

Religious Interactions in Modern India

Martin Fuchs and Vasudha Dalmia

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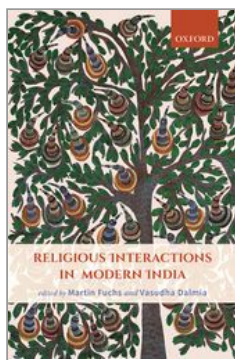
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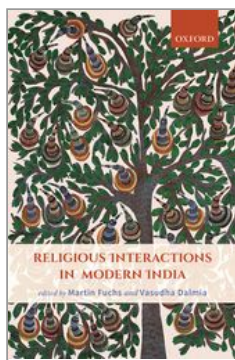
(p.vii) Acknowledgements

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The chapters included in this volume have been thoroughly reworked based on the discussions at the conference. We thank the German Research Foundation (grant KFOR 1013) as well as the Catherine and William L. Magistretti Research Chair Funds, University of California at Berkeley, USA, for the financial support which made the conference possible. We thank all contributors and other participants for critical discussions during and after the conference and for their remarkable collaborative spirit over the years that have passed since the conference. **(p.viii)**

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(p.ix) Introduction*

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(p.ix) Introduction*

Discussing religion in modern India may sound straightforward, but it is not. For many, the very idea of religion—as an expression of human dependence or as its cloak—has become contentious.¹ Religion as such, and not only individual religions, has been seen as under threat from forces of secularization. Conversely, others have diagnosed a counteracting response to secularization, a movement of de-secularization or increasing resurgence of religion over recent decades.² Both these understandings are too narrow. Both present only parts of the story. While a new thrust and new shapes of secularization appeared in what we call modernity, the modernizing forces of secularization have been overestimated.³

Querying the Parameters

What we do find instead is that religions have assumed new forms, as they have also had to explore new ways of relating to each other, **(p.x)** to society, and to the respective political sphere. Religions, or better and more precisely, practices, ideas, and communities with religious and spiritual agendas, not unlike practices and concepts in other fields of social life, have had to newly situate and justify themselves on a new—public—playing ground. What has changed, then, are the forms of discourse, as also the forms of categorical affiliations. The emerging new publics have not only meant that ideas and practices have had to be defended and amended or transformed, they have also grown in reach, making the respective publics become more comprehensive and interlinked. More and more people have been drawn into these exchanges on a nationalizing and increasingly globalizing scale. There has been a change in the very dynamics of social and political power. One consequence has been the

tightening of collective identities, leading to new forms of horizontal instead of vertical or hierarchical exclusivity. Competition, challenges, as well as an assertion of positions more often than not have meant digging in one's heels, closing ranks, and becoming defensive or combative.

Modernity itself is a fuzzy concept, under recurring dispute and constantly reformulated. Some sociologists even make the case that modernity is an inaccurate concept.⁴ Others use the occasion to make a plea for a cosmopolitan reorientation of sociology.⁵ Recent debates relating to the Indian experience have emphasized the 'conjuncturality' and entanglement of the different, Western and non-Western (early and high) modernities as well as the reciprocal articulation of elements of tradition and modernity, while questioning the very binaries that came into being at the same time as the notion of modernity.⁶ This book does not enter into discussions regarding the diverse notions of modernity. Instead, it attempts to explore the meanings and manifestations of modern forms of religion.

Like the concept of modernity, the very notion of religion, the transfer from its Christian ancestry to all spiritual, ritual, or salvific phenomena encountered in the world—embraced by comparative religious studies—seems meanwhile increasingly contested in scholarly **(p.xi)** literature, not least the application of this term to the Hinduistic religious realm or even broader to the non-Christian 'world religions' at large. This is often directly linked to concerns about a colonialist and/or orientalist agenda. But the attempt to insist on Western-centrism can easily become reductionist, excluding or downplaying India's as well as others' own dynamisms (as, for instance, a kind of second-level self-orientalization). Moreover, not only has the term 'religion' (like that of modernity, or as part and parcel of the notion of modernity) meanwhile been implanted globally, but has also reached the social actors whom scholars have placed under its umbrella, a classic case of double hermeneutics.⁷ It has meanwhile been integrated into everyday language all over the world, including India, and ordinary people have added it to their own vocabulary, often using the English term as loanword in their own languages. This may be an indication that the other terms extant, whose meanings partly overlap with the term 'religion'—and many such terms can actually be found in Indian languages—do not provide the same comparative and at the same time undefined scope.

There are also normative implications to the modernist notion of religion. To distinguish religion and the other social spheres was long seen to imply that each action would be legitimate only in the respective sphere to which it *prima facie* belonged, and that cases of overlapping between spheres, and those of religion and politics in particular, would have to be reckoned as transgression. With respect to religion, such conceptions build on the notion of religion as private and of belief or experience as denoting a realm interior to the self (directly addressed by David Gilmartin in this volume). By contrast, most of the

chapters in this volume illustrate the extent to which religion is something public, also in the modern context, even when and where it appears to be explicitly based on interiority, spirituality, and individual choices. This is not to deny the existence of an inner realm of experience and belief. However, what this denies is that this become the defining moment of religion. Moreover, the cases dealt with here illustrate the paradox that while conceptually the distinction between religion and the other spheres has become widely accepted among social actors as well as thinkers, yet, in pragmatic contexts, **(p.xii)** religion and politics are closely intertwined. Even when not directly part of politics, religion under modern conditions appears over and over again as part of the political (in distinction from, but including, politics). Religious visions and practices represent an avenue to, as they are part of, reality—social, political, artistic, and emotional realities and the ‘not immediately plausible’ ones—⁸ in modern contexts as much as in non-modern ones. ‘Religions’ react and relate to challenges as well as opportunities, or, in a more precise formulation (as illustrated by many of the contributions to the volume), people reacting and relating to changing and unsettling circumstances frequently do so through religious idioms. ‘Religions’ provide languages, frames to think with, to express critique, programmatic perspectives, social imaginaries, ethics and values, and ideas of sociality, to articulate modes of action or the relation between private and public. The chapters in this volume put individual and collective actors and modalities of practice in the foreground, contextualizing and positioning them, and in this way, explore the meandering engagements with religion—they do not seek to provide an objectifying view of the religious landscape nor a theory of religion ‘in’ modernity.

The fact that we all use the term ‘religion’ today does not mean that we all share the same meaning. Nor does it mean that all social actors accept the modern delineations between ‘religion’ and other social spheres the same way. What we can, and what we have to, do is investigate the various denotations and applications of the term and its interrelation with other terms. We have to distinguish between the usages of the term ‘religion’ as referring to spiritualities, to soteriological or to ritual practices, to conceptualizations of world and cosmos, human and non-human, self, non-self, and larger self, to immanence and transcendence (or the immanence of the transcendent), to institutional structures, and to what is being called ‘identities’. It is the identitarian dimension of religion that has moved centre stage in the contemporary public realm, though the other connotations still coexist.

With this in mind, we finally have to take note of another paradox. While in public discourse as well as in official documentation today, **(p.xiii)** religions appear more often than not as blocks, as clearly marked and circumscribed entities of transhistorical dimension, to which a person belongs and which are assumed to provide a clear-cut identity, within the field of comparative religious studies, the notion of religions as ‘blocks’ has come under increasing scrutiny

and, in consequence, been increasingly discarded. Historically, and if looked at closely even today, we encounter many different Christianities, Buddhisms, or Islams as well as many and differing Hindu forms of religiosity, differing by region and time (and not just denominationally, which as such would be nothing more than just splitting the religious field up into even smaller blocks) and represented by different people. Each form shares some, but not all, elements with other forms, the degree of commonality being different in each case. Attempts in real life of establishing and enforcing larger unitary block-like structures of religion (and of rigidly defined and effectively policed forms of collective identity) are themselves political endeavours and have to be judged as such.

We do not take any of the parameters alluded to here for granted nor do we propose any of these as preset frame for the following studies. For, the frame itself is at issue. What the studies in this volume focus on instead is the processuality of things religious, and this even in the very moment of apparent hardening and solidifying. This approach makes it possible to give full due to the tensions and contradictions that may arise in these very processes—we do not try to streamline or smoothen whatever we carve out as processes.

Modern Re-articulations of Indian Religions

Like the sister volume, *Religious Interactions in Mughal India*,⁹ this volume tries to avoid reading the (modern) outcomes of non-teleological, unavoidably contingent historical developments back into history, avoiding the assumption of originating constellations. Rather, the book starts from vacillating constellations, which involve varieties of actors, positionalities, and structural alignments. The chapters depict the various modes in which the different actors try to find their way **(p.xiv)** and establish themselves vis-à-vis each other. In all this, the specificities of sociocultural and political contexts are of great significance. Thus, identitarian labels of Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism, Buddhism, or other 'religions' are taken as one outcome, keeping the contingencies of historical processes in mind, and never as the only or even final outcome. The chapters do not attempt to mark a decisive point at which the unification of religious strands and traditions into one or the other of the respective blocks seems to have gained the upper hand, without so far having been able to kill diversity entirely. Rather, the contributors regard any affirmation of a clear-cut identity as a proposal within the context of other dispersing and countervailing forces.

While thinking in terms of processes helps to bring out the complexity of constellations and events as well as the abundance of internal tensions involved, only a comparative look across a time gap of several centuries makes it possible to throw into relief the longer-term cumulative tectonic shifts. Spanning the time from what has been termed early modernity—¹⁰ covered by *Religious Interactions in Mughal India*—up to the middle of the twentieth century, covered in this volume, brings the similarities as well as differences between the two

periods into stark light. In both time constellations, different credos were brought to a new awareness of each other, and can be seen as being forced to situate themselves vis-à-vis others: 'the sheer presence of alternative modalities of thought presented motivations and opportunities that could not have existed before' (Ganeri 2014, 86; 2011, 7).

On the other hand, if one can see the sixteenth/seventeenth century as a time of intense dialogue, of sharing of religio-cultural idioms across affiliations, and of exploring other religious options that might supplement one's own, and this concurrently at various social levels, while being accompanied by sometimes heightened attempts at demarcation against positions that seem the closest,¹¹ the long nineteenth century could rather be characterized as a time of exploration, competition, and dispute of a different kind—more inward-looking while self-expanding, modelling each religion on a **(p.xv)** prototype, vigorously delineating self and other. The period of further advanced modernity in India, under colonial auspices, became a period of increasing assertion and of self-finding with regard to one's respective group, tradition, or ideology, and of systematization (new canonization) of ideas and practices, connected with attempts of establishing, enlarging, or re-setting 'communities' and community boundaries where these had not been set earlier, or the attempt of forging larger alliances or overarching canopies. Happening publicly and on a common playground in which more and more people of different outlook were deliberating, beginning to consider themselves as proto-citizens of a proto-nation, this all too easily led to situations in which some started arrogating to themselves the authority to speak not just as leaders of a group, but on behalf of a whole category of people. Involved were attempts of mainstreaming the governance structures of the re-configured communities. Boundaries between religious entities were not just redrawn, but overlaps between strands, commonalities of ideas, and 'texts, tropes, tales, and ... gods shared across what may appear today to be mutually antagonistic religious communities' were increasingly repudiated or downplayed.¹² Antagonisms having so far been centred on adjoining religious segments (for example, between the various Vaishnava *sampradayas*) were now shifted outwards, creating external boundaries, and were played out on a grander scale, introducing a feeling of radical otherness (Dalmia, this volume). The intensification of intercultural and interreligious contacts and exchanges, for which the time and the personality of Akbar have become so exemplary,¹³ has become not just even more pervasive in the phase covered by this volume (and are of relevance in basically all of the contributions), but became decisive for all religious self-expressions and resulted in completely different attitudes to each other, though moments of the earlier modalities remained.

It is pivotal, then, that we think in terms of processes, not of givens, nor see the processes through a narrow political lens. While prominently involved in politics of identity—more to establish collective identities than to support or protect

existing ones—and part of a struggle over control of political power and resources via the modern **(p.xvi)** politics of numbers, religious actors also felt the compulsion to systematize their respective turf—both defend it and mark its specificity—and show its high ranking on a universalist scale.

External factors often invoked to explain the trend to unification include, in addition to the creation of new publics, the politics of enumeration as well as nationalization with its derivatives of essentialization, ethnicization, and communalization, or more broadly the politics of identity. Furthermore, we need to consider the formation of the new middle classes, the laicization of the interpretation of the core religious texts, and the availability of new media and modes of communication which allowed for the connection of people over distances who so far had not even known of each other (the backdrop to Benedict Anderson's imagined communities). From this angle, too, we might have to consider several, even competing, options or strategies for the unification of a group of religious traditions.

We can, for instance, distinguish three conceptualizations of Hindu unity proposed during the period covered by this book. The first is that of the Vedic origin of the later Hinduism. In this scheme, the later introduction of iconic worship and the Puranic texts appear as either developments of these origins or, in reverse, as deviations that are to be corrected. The second and more prominent one—partly overlapping with the first with regard to the relevance of the Upanishads—is the monistic neo-Vedantic Advaitic paradigm, largely text-based and couched in philosophical argument, for which, in their different ways, stand names as iconic as Rammohun Roy, Vivekananda, Gandhi, and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. 'Perennialist' at the core,¹⁴ neo-Vedantic positions increasingly stood for an inclusivism that claims to subsume all other philosophical and theological positions, including dualist ones, as different shades under its umbrella. Pushed even further, the claim is that the Advaitic position represents universal religion (together with an explicit or implicit claim of superiority over all other religions). This way, it overrides other possibilities of Advaitic monism, such as the denial of homogeneity, the acknowledgement of simultaneous options, and the idea of shared truth (Kumkum Sangari and Dharampal-Frick and Banerjee in this volume).

(p.xvii) The third conceptualization of Hindu unity, of a pan-Indian bhakti *andolan*, or movement, developed in the shadow, and partially as critique of the second one (there have also been attempts to blend both conceptualizations). This conceptualization saw devotionism as a movement that represented 'the life force of Indian culture'¹⁵ and integrated Hinduism and the country over a long historical process covering at least one and a half millennia. Spreading in consecutive stages, and traversing the whole subcontinent, it was seen as coming to a conclusion in the 1940s in the form of *desh bhakti*, or devotion to the nation. While also referring back to textual traditions, albeit constituted of

very different kinds of texts, this conceptualization was not only moulded on a historical template, but in addition was grounded in assumptions concerning the attitudes of practising believers towards the Divine. This construction itself grew in stages and involved various individual public figures and scholars during the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries, linked to the nationalist movement, among others Harishchandra of Benares, Kshitimohan Sen, Hazariprasad Dvivedi, and Ramchandra Shukla.¹⁶

All three constructions selectively drew on findings and arguments of Western 'Orientalist' scholars, although in different ways, with each drawing upon a different set of scholars. At the same time, each model points back to earlier, precolonial ideas and constructions. The rise to prominence of Advaita monist Vedanta in the nineteenth century has to be seen against the background of earlier attempts at uniting philosophical thought that we now describe as Hindu, which involved disputes between different forms of Vedanta, including especially the *bhedābheda* ('difference and non-difference') form.¹⁷ Similarly, and this connects us to the high noon of the Mughal period and to our sister volume (Dalmia and Faruqi 2014¹⁸), the rise (**p.xviii**) in prominence of bhakti, devotionism, in the north is a feature of roughly the same period.¹⁹ The *chatuh sampradaya*, or four sampradaya, formula uniting the four competing north Indian Vaishnava lineages (with connections that hark back to communities in the south), and the story in the *Bhagavata Mahatmya* of the personified bhakti moving from south to north of the subcontinent, which were both subsequently elaborated in the seventeenth/eighteenth century, have been proposed as precursors of the plot of a transregional bhakti movement.²⁰ Harishchandra in the late nineteenth century built on this idea of bhakti as integrative, all pervasive, and overarching principle and force.²¹ At the same time, the motif of deriding Brahminical authority and lifestyle features regularly in various bhakti contexts, in the north particularly strongly since the time of Kabir. The parallels, contestations, and dynamics, including interconnections, between these constructions, between bhakti and monistic ideas, especially during the interim period of the eighteenth century, have not yet been fully understood.

The stories of the formation of core narratives and encompassing ideologies ('identities') of modern Hinduism have to be seen as part of the wider religious dynamics and religious-political-societal interactions in India. The equations between religious groups, ideologies/ideas, and strands change across the two time spans covered by the two sister volumes, as also the equations—and differentiation!—between society, polity, and religion. These are processes have not come to a standstill yet and point towards an unclear future. Starting with the early modern, and reaching beyond the period focused on here into our times, it is the global component, the effects of transregional and transcontinental connections, the internationalization of many Indic religious groups (besides Christianities and Islams), and global fundamentalisms that

become of ever greater relevance—even though many of these developments took roots in the nineteenth century and even earlier.

(p.xix) Thus, taking the period reviewed by this volume as one of accelerating changes, the book covers the ‘long nineteenth century’, in several instances pointing back to the seventeenth and sometimes also earlier centuries, and extending into the midst of the twentieth and the beginning of the postcolonial era. Starting with the Bengal-centred interactions with Britain in the 1790s, the book closes with 1957, the year of the publication of Ambedkar’s *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, a year after his demise, thus comprising the colonial period, but looking beyond it into the first decade of independence.

The Chapters

Gita Dharampal-Frick and Milinda Banerjee underline the importance of religion in building modernity, both in the sense of questioning religious certitudes and of utilizing religious paradigms. Focusing on the early nineteenth century, particularly the nexus between Rammohun Roy’s religious deliberations and William Wilberforce’s religious policies, the chapter conceives the nexus between India and Britain as dialogue between ‘late precolonial’ (the two authors see this as still part of the ‘early modern’) and colonial-modern institutional dynamics of change. The two historical figures mark a point of transition, for Wilberforce from early modern Protestant religious zeal to a new British imperial civilizing mission, for Roy from the precolonial to the colonial ideological perspectives. Wilberforce’s intervention involves constructing a new model of Hinduism and the Hindu ‘other’ from the perspective of Anglo-Protestant Christianity. Rammohun Roy sets a trajectory of transnational ethical-religious debate followed subsequently by other Indian public intellectuals, among them Vivekananda, Tagore, and Gandhi. The authors emphasize the interconnections between the developments of the nineteenth-century public spheres in Britain and India, even if the respective agendas differed. This finds particular expression in the personality of Rammohun Roy, who controversially engaged with Christian theology in Bengal and became an internationally recognized voice through his involvement in religious and parliamentary matters in Britain. However, the meaning both gave to the term ‘religion’ differed. While Wilberforce regarded only one religion as authentic and true, Roy looked for the truth shared by all (elite) forms of religion. Embedded in precolonial early modern hermeneutic **(p.xx)** cultures and arenas of debate, Persian as well as Sanskrit-Bengali, in Brahminical as well as Vaishnava bhakti modes of argumentation, Roy engaged with Western-Christian interpretive modalities and ventured into print-based communication. A feature that remained constant was his belief in one God. Starting with a comparative evaluation of different theological-religious traditions, which all seemed ‘false’ to him (*Tuhfat*), he later integrated this with Enlightenment as well as Christian reformist and anti-Trinitarian vocabularies (including the use of the term ‘Supreme Being’). At the same time, Roy shared the anti-idolatry penchant of Christian missionaries,

though originating from a different background, while he undertook what Dharampal-Frick and Banerjee call a de-provincialization of Christian theology. Roy retained his multiple loyalties to the last.

Of a very different kind is the story of the mid-nineteenth-century rule of Sikandar Begum in the princely state of Bhopal in central India. What stands out in her case is neither religious fervour nor an attempt at mitigating the bearing of different religions. Barbara Metcalf depicts the exceptional case of this Muslim woman ruler, whose mother had also been the regent of Bhopal state and whose daughter followed her as ruler on that throne, as a matter-of-fact transition from an earlier local form of Islamic statecraft, which did not shy away from the use of force and relied on a decentralized structure, to a new mode of more centralized administration following the British model, under the observation of British overlordship. Instead of engaging in Sufism or in reformist Islam, she personally practised what Metcalf calls a Protestant-style Islam, without, however, attempting to curb other denominational observances. There was no idea yet of a distinct 'Muslim world', rather a fusion of traditional and what was considered modern (administrative) practices from the top down, appropriating Mughal paraphernalia, without raising the issue of religious identity in any emphatic sense.

A different way of self-ascertaining one's situation and position is presented by Srilata Raman. Hers is a story of a conflict within a tradition, not between different religious traditions, though the presence of other traditions, and especially of missionary Christendom, is a strong factor influencing this 'inner conflict of tradition'. This chapter takes us to the south, to the Śaiva Siddhānta tradition in what is present-day Tamil Nadu. Raman deals with what she considers 'a (p.xxi) signature literary event of Tamil modernity', the attack in the 1860s on Ramalinga Swamikal, a modern Saiva poet and self-styled *siddha*, someone who possesses charismatic powers, led by Arumuga Navalar, a Saivite scholar. Both religious leaders, while very different in their approaches, shared a lay background. Navalar represented a form of religious neo-traditionalism that was highly critical of extant practices, especially of those of lower caste and class, and insisted on going back to the canonical *āgamic* texts. Navalar's agenda was to regulate temple worship and purify it from what he saw as degenerate and constantly innovating practices—an agenda of standardization consistent with high cultural norms. The struggle revolved around the definition of the Śaivite canon. Navalar was upset by Ramalinga's immense success with the songs he had composed, a collection of which had been published in 1867 under the name *Tiruvaruṭpā*. Navalar opposed the acceptance of Ramalinga and his poems or songs as being on par with those of the earlier poet-saints. While ferociously attacking not only Ramalinga's scribal and theological errors, Navalar also flayed the personality, behaviour, and physical appearance of Ramalinga. Raman sees Navalar, on the one hand, as standing in a long Indian polemical literary tradition, articulated in both Sanskrit and Tamil. On the other

hand, she observes important changes of this tradition in the seventeenth century, 'a new critical attitude towards the near past combined with a reverence towards the distant past', which gained new force in the mid-nineteenth century, being instigated further by the influence of both Jesuitical and Evangelical Christian missionaries. Raman observes aspects of a mimetic relationship of Navalar to the religious and political others, Christian missionaries and British administrators, which he otherwise strongly repudiated. She sees Navalar as pursuing a deliberate 'protestantisation' of Śaivism, laying down new lines of exclusion and inclusion. In this case, too, the availability of print technology changed the style of the polemics. At stake was what constitutes Śaiva Siddhānta at a particular historical moment.

What counts as correct practice and belief is an issue also for Jains, as John Cort reports. Cort focuses on the creation of a new sense of religious identity across Indian religions over the nineteenth century, analysing in particular the process in which a pan-Indian concept of being 'Jain' developed. The two conflictual cases he discusses turn around whether or not it is proper for Jains to worship icons of the **(p.xxii)** Jinas, an issue among Jains since at least the fifteenth century. The cases involved Ḍhūṇḍhiyā, later Sthānakvāsī, 'hall-dwellers', and Mūrtipūjak Jains, critiques and proponents of icon worship, and, in the case of the second dispute, also the founder of the Arya Samaj, Dayanand Saraswati. Whereas in the 1820s, in Cort's view, identity was primarily defined by caste, sixty years later, the common identity was the religious one of being 'Jain', considered as a shared community and as social reality. The conflict in the 1820s, involving the region of Gujarat and Bombay, resulted in an expulsion of Ḍhūṇḍhiyās from their caste; the conflict in the 1880s led to a defamation case against Dayanand on behalf of not just an individual, but also followers of Jainism at large. Followers of Jain beliefs now started objectifying their own culture. Cort makes the point that religion came to be seen as something external to a person, something a person could affirm or reject. This goes together with a new focus on the individual as autonomous and a rights-bearing subject. Demonstrating the role and impact of the new public sphere in the case of both disputes, Cort argues that two colonialism-driven projects came together here—the introduction of the British legal system—which tended towards a formal equality of contestants and their capacity as bearers of rights, and the introduction of new technologies, of travel, communication, and dissemination of information—the railroad, the postal service, and, again, the printing press.

Similar to Cort, Dayanand Saraswati serves as a main reference point for Vasudha Dalmia in her chapter. While Cort tracks the establishment of an overarching Jain identity, Dalmia focuses her attention on the consolidation of a Hindu identity. It is her concern to explore how what we today know as Hinduism came about, what strategies were employed in its formative phase, and how, in particular, one dealt with difference. She compares two texts that were of core relevance for the constitution of modern Hinduism, Dayanand's

Satyarth Prakash (first published in 1875) and the catechism *Sanatana Dharma: An Elementary Textbook of Hindu Religion and Ethics*, written by Annie Besant and Bhagawan Das (first published in 1903). Both texts attempted to apply the modern philological-historical approach in citing authoritative Sanskrit texts. The significant point of difference lies in how the two texts deal with religious difference and pluralities, both within and without Hinduism as it came to be **(p.xxiii)** established. While in the earlier mode of reformulation of Hinduism represented by *Satyarth Prakash*, other Hinduistic belief systems and practices were dealt with by denying their validity and by engaging with them, the new mode represented by the *Elementary Textbook* was one of claiming overarching validity for a singular belief system by subsuming difference, without engaging with manifestly other forms of 'Hindu' belief systems. Besant and Das, who preferred the term *sanatana dharma*, eternal religion, to that of Hinduism, conceived it as overarching and all inclusive—no part of the Smriti was disclaimed. At the same time *varnashrama dharma*, the dharma pertaining to the different stages of life and the fourfold caste scheme, was confirmed, though it was loosened and universalized, with no room left for Untouchables. Emphasis was laid on what unites Hindus, while what divides them was sidelined. While asking for tolerance, the other, non-Hinduistic religions were put strictly outside the Hindu fold. This can be seen as a point of difference to Gandhi, who stressed commonalities of Hinduism with other religions (compare Sangari later). What Dalmia emphasizes is that while at an earlier time it was the skirmishes among Hindu groups with their respective Hindu others that were particularly significant, it is the otherness of the non-Hindus that became more important with the new phase. Differences between Hindu traditions were now glossed over and the attempt was made to close ranks between even radically different Hindu formations. In these respects, Dalmia sees the late nineteenth/early twentieth century as a watershed in the formation of modern Hinduism.

In her chapter on a phase of Sikhism, Anne Murphy throws a different light on a process of establishing a modern form of group identity. Hers is a perspective not usually chosen; she asks who has control over or property rights in religious sites. The chapter follows the consecutive stages of religious property regimes, concluding with the Gurdwara Reform Act of 1925. The reform act recognized a central representative body of Sikhs, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, as possessing the rightful interest in Sikh religious sites. Murphy strongly makes the point that colonial governance drew on pre-existing cultural, economic, and political forms, even as they transformed them. There had been an interest in enumerating communities, particularly castes, in precolonial times; she also shows that the idea of individual rights (of control or ownership) had also **(p.xxiv)** not been foreign to precolonial times. In the case of religious grants, the individual grant recipients, however, were usually located within, or seen as representing, broader community or group categories of various kinds such as caste, guru lineages, and different Sikh faith traditions. She sees this as

exemplarily documented by the Khalsa Darbar *dharmarth* records, records of religious grants, of the kingdom of Lahore founded by Ranjit Singh in 1799. Murphy also picks out what she considers a few exceptions, such as grants to the *granth sāhibān*, or the esteemed texts, the Adi Granth and the Baba Granth Sahib, or to the Darbar Sahib ('Golden Temple'). After 1847, under the British, there grew the idea to designate corporate bodies as the ones to whom to hand over control over sacred sites—in particular, the Sikh Khalsa body, now conceived as a single sovereign entity. The tensions between individual and corporate control over gurdwaras and the lands associated with them, embattled particularly in the 1910s and 1920s, were then resolved in favour of the community with the Gurdwara Reform Act. Murphy regards this as a new model, in which not only a community was tied to property and as a whole received sovereign rights, but in which also the idea of a singular Sikh community, and thus a new political form of community, was instituted. The modern management of gurdwaras represents a complex amalgam of precolonial and colonial practices and understandings of the formation of a religious community.

While the Sikh case documents an example of adjustment to the modern, colonial legal and institutional framework that strengthens a core group, confirming it as a body, the case of the Dādūpanthis, presented by Monika Horstmann, provides a different story of group adjustment to modern conditions, one of self-reform against the background of the weakening of collective identity and of the sampradaya's institutional framework. Horstmann examines the stages of Dādūpanthi reform between the 1890s and the present day, the shift of a sect once dominated by sadhus from monastic to lay ideals and to governance by householders, many of whom, however, were ex-sadhus. Once again, this happened not without internal tensions and struggle. The process created deep rifts between sadhus and householders. Originally primarily a community of sadhus, but now including householders, Dādūpanthis for a long time would not see the crisis of the monastic system, and hoped that small internal **(p.xxv)** reforms could preserve the gist of sadhu-ness and sant ideals. The backbone of the story is the stepwise dismantling and, in 1938, final disbandment of the military Nāgā wing of the Dādūpanthis. Aside from the search for new occupational activities, the main focus in this process lay on education. Targeting primarily their own as well as other monastic orders and Brahmin candidates, and connecting partly with Gandhian patriotism, the prime idea became to develop models of a Hindu way of life impermeable to Westernization, and produce educated spiritual and social leaders who would become builders of a modern independent India and engage in social and political activities. Contrary to the intent of the authors of the reform programme, however, precisely these reforms were instrumental in a shift to lay ideals promoted by householding individuals. Horstmann describes them as citizens committed to Dādūpanthī as well as social values. In this process, a new householder elite

developed out of the earlier monk elite, not least because of the control of property that had belonged to the sampradaya.

A different way of adapting traditional ideas of *samnyasi*-hood, the ways of a renouncer, to the challenges of the modern world is addressed by Catherine Clémentin-Ojha. She sees the period between 1905 and 1920 as one in which the ideal of renunciation was given a new lease of life. Focusing on Swami Shraddhananda (1857–1926), she puts him in a line starting with the Swaminarayan sect and Vivekananda, advocating social service. She regards Shraddhananda together with Mahatma Gandhi as representing the turn towards an idea(l) of political *samnyasi*-hood in the early phase of the twentieth century. It was his contact with Gandhi that made Shraddhananda give *samnyasa* a political turn in 1919, after the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. Both shared the conviction that the regeneration of India could only be achieved through a personal disciplinary regime. Paying particular attention to the speech Shraddhananda gave at the 1919 session of the Indian National Congress in Amritsar, Clémentin-Ojha demonstrates how he expressed his understanding of the public function of a modern *samnyasi* in his own particular way. Shraddhananda, who in the years before had contributed to the deterioration of inter-communal relationships in Punjab, had ordained himself *samnyasi* in 1917. Clémentin-Ojha argues that his assertion of moral authority was also self-proclaimed. While traditionally a *samnyasi* renounced **(p.xxvi)** his social role and collective religious activities in order to pursue his own spiritual liberation—a personal goal—Shraddhananda conceived of a *samnyasi* in his day as one who uses his independence to become a responsible actor in social and political matters, doing *seva*, service, for the whole world (*samsara*) and working for the liberation of the nation. This went against the earlier stand of Arya Samajis who had wanted politics and religion to be kept apart. At the same time, while Arya Samajis had always been very critical of the ‘idle’ traditional *samnyasis*, they had retained the ideal of *samnyasi*-hood. Interpreting *samnyasa*, Shraddhananda based himself on the Bhagavad Gita, a text whose theory of ethical action itself became an instrument of political action during the early twentieth century, reformulating detachment from worldly matters as disinterestedness. Catherine Clémentin-Ojha embeds her analysis of political *samnyasi*-hood in a specific understanding of secularization following which the secular does not necessarily become the encompassing reality, but which allows for values and forms of institutionalization to be transferred from the religious to the secular sphere.

Bringing Gandhi centre stage, Kumkum Sangari discusses a different dimension of his approach and perspective. She addresses a core aspect in his frame of thought, the notion of what she calls multiple religious belonging. She sees Gandhi moving from a synthetic Hinduism in the 1910s and 1920s to a discourse of multiple belonging that became quite vigorous in the 1940s, but remained permeated by tensions. She sees her protagonist as standing in a line with earlier thinkers, this time reaching back much further into the deep premodern.

She sees connections, while at the same time pointing to the differences, between Gandhi's focus on multi-religious pluralism and the positions formulated by the likes of Ibn al-'Arabi (twelfth/thirteenth century) and Bulhe Shah (seventeenth/eighteenth century). Their religious thinking turned around the question of the One and the many, which linked especially Sufi and Hindu discourses, and here north Indian saints as well as Vedantists. Characteristic for al-'Arabi in her eyes was the idea of the Unity of Being or Existence, *wahdat al-wujud*, and his assumption of the multiplicity of divine names and the many paths to a single god. Bulhe Shah considered the divine a shape-shifting god who could take Vaishnava and Muslim guises, his claim being one of not belonging to any particular religion.

(p.xxvii) Against this background, Gandhi can be seen making the claim to be everything. His ethical universalism was grounded in the nation-to-be and its civilizational unity. Sangari emphasizes that Gandhi attempted to formulate a set of ethical and metaphysical universals that were common to all religions. His was a concept of individualization of the worshipper and of multiple belonging. He was addressing the problem of communalization of contemporary India. According to the principle of a fundamental unity that runs through all the diversity, in Gandhi's view none had the right to condemn or reform the elements of any religion but his/her own. Against this background, Sangari sees Gandhi attempting to devise a non-sectarian Hinduism that was inclusive of all that was exemplary in other religions, thus differentiating himself from communalists. By the 1940s, Gandhi's concept of Hinduism became less exclusivist, and a Hindu became less different from his others. Gandhi's earlier intuition of simultaneously belonging to all religions grew into greater prominence and he denied narrow notions of identity to religions, or the view that religions were the exclusive property of those born into them. However, when Gandhi tried to define the special essence of Hinduism, Sangari sees his non-sectarian project falter: claiming a special universalizability for Hinduism, Gandhi too fell victim to the idea of Hindu exceptionalism. Kumkum Sangari underlines how multi-religious pluralism was narrowed to Hindu pluralism: other pluralisms, including Islamic ones, were omitted. Sangari ends with pointing out how Gandhi's idea of eradicating untouchability, through voluntary identification with the poor and disadvantaged (levelling through downward identification), was connected to attaining a state of multiple belonging.

An example of successful religious coexistence at a very different pragmatic level is presented by Anna Bigelow. Hers is the case of the Punjabi princely state of Malerkotla, which encountered a series of disputes concerning the audibility of Hindu and Muslim rituals that extended from 1923 to 1940, shortly before the 1947 Partition: the Malerkotla *arati-katha-namaz* disputes, referring to Hindu worship and recitation on the one hand, and Muslim prayer on the other. According to Bigelow, no one died in Partition-related violence in Malerkotla, and, alone among East Punjab communities, a large majority of the local Muslim

population remained there rather than migrate to Pakistan. The town is today the only remaining Muslim **(p.xxviii)** majority town in Indian Punjab. Malerkotla has been praised for its collective ethos of harmony—a locally dominant framework for managing inter-religious conflict that continues to this day. Malerkotla shows a complex history of conflict, including incidents with religious overtones, going back to the state's foundation in the mid-fifteenth century. In the twentieth century, under the local nawab's rule, political organization of any kind was not permitted, but religious groups had a fair amount of freedom. Non-Muslims, as well as non-dominant Muslims, however, did not have the same property or political rights. Supplementary conflicts over inequalities played a role in these disputes, like one over land rights that in 1927 ended in police firing, as also the fact that the rulers had high debts towards Hindu citizens and moneylenders. At the same time in British India, political organization on religious grounds was becoming increasingly institutionalized. In the arati-katha-namaz conflict, the competition for dominance of the spiritual soundscape was thus seen as tied to perceived imbalances of control over other shared arenas of civic life and the dispute over the relative place of the various religious communities. Documents on communal violence from colonial India treated conflicts over sound as proximate causes of riots. The resolution of inter-religious communal conflicts in Malerkotla was achieved by local leaders who sorted things out among themselves. The agreement in 1940 between local Hindu and Muslim leaders was not to interfere in future in the practices of the other community. What this required was mutual awareness and attention to the religious other: the expression of ethical values in spite of mutual feelings of resentment. The value of coexistence was construed by local leaders to be ethically more important than the articulation of oppositional identities through sound practices. In the aftermath, even while Malerkotla too experienced several cases of communal stress, especially after the destruction of Babri Masjid in 1992, a mode of disciplining dissent seems to have been in place, in the form of communal self-regulation and communication between religious communities (including neighbourhood and other networks, a peace committee, rituals of forgiveness), that helped to avert major clashes between Hindus and Muslims. Malerkotla's reputation is that of the 'cradle of love and friendship'.

A different aspect of the politics of religion is addressed by David Gilmartin. He discusses the connections between religion and **(p.xxix)** popular sovereignty during the late colonial period in relation to voting. Suggesting a continuity in conceptions of sovereign authority since the models of kingship that earlier were prevalent in both India and Europe, according to which the king was seen as simultaneously embedded in society and the transcendent, he argues that the modern idea of the people's sovereignty in India as well as Europe ultimately builds on precisely the same tensions between worldliness and appeals to the transcendent that have marked the history of sovereignty. The consent-bearing individual has been defined by the claim to an autonomous capacity for free

rational choice and inclusion in society with its dependencies and pressures. This was crystallized in the shape of the figure of the voter and of the involvement of religion and religious community during election, following the establishment of elected provincial councils in India after 1919 (Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms). Gilmartin explores two key aspects of the legal contradictions embedded in elections, the legal concept of 'undue influence', and the relationship between conscience, community, and free choice. Starting with the idea that a non-corrupt system of voting requires autonomous individuals not standing in a relationship of dependence, thus excluding large numbers of people from voting, the paradoxes of sovereignty were increasingly transposed into the self, conceived as an inner struggle between conscience and free choice, on one side, and the coercive pressures of society, on the other. Gilmartin discusses several election cases in India and Burma starting in the 1920s, in which issues of 'undue influence' were raised, and explicates the difficulties of distinguishing religion as a form of external power exerted by religious authorities, from religion as an inner realm of an autonomous self. At issue was how the operation of religious influence in general was to be understood. In this context, Gilmartin discusses the changing, and contested, definitions of 'religion' and of the notion of a moral self, equipped with conscience and the ability of free choice (with roots outside the social world) in colonial India. Emphasizing the Protestant missionary background of these ideas, he asserts that such ideas resonated with many Indian religious reformers. He points in particular to both the case of many followers of the Arya Samaj, and a widespread normative reformist vision of religious experience in Indian Islam, as separated from society and rooted in an internal realm and influenced by conscience and **(p.xxx)** scripture. Gilmartin shows how difficult it was to draw a line between the operation of influence and free devotional commitment to a religious community.

The last two chapters bring us to the period of transition from India under colonial rule to the first decades of modern India's independence. At the same time, both these chapters present Dalit agendas of religious change, but change of a different kind. Dalits undertook initiatives that extended beyond the existing range of religious forms and were linked to a struggle for a thorough change of social, and not just political, relationships in India. The last chapter, which focuses on Ambedkar's deliberations on Buddhism as well as religion in general, in a way also provides a kind of conclusion of the volume, touching on the general issue of the relationship between religion and society, in India and for human association in general, that Ambedkar raised in a distinctive way.

George Oommen discusses post-conversion experiences and struggles of Dalits who had opted for Christianity. His chapter deals with the struggles of Christian Pulayas in Kerala, who had become members of the Anglican Church during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a result of the Church Missionary Society's evangelization. They regard the conversion to Christianity

as acknowledgement of their dignity as human beings and as liberation from the Kerala forms of slavery. The change of religion, which also involved some opportunities for educational mobility, led to new self-assessment and identity-seeking among Christian Pulayas, concerning the new faith as well as, at a certain stage, their affiliation with the Communist movement. Oommen illustrates, taking up various contexts, how Pulayas were pushed back by others, but also themselves fell back on their *jati*, or caste, identity. He wants to contradict the general perception, including Ambedkar's, that Dalit Christians did not have any significant contribution to make either to their own caste community or to the liberation of Dalits in general, once they had converted to Christianity.

The major conflicts and struggles Pulayas had were with Syrian Christians, both with the Syrian Christian elite in the Church, where its members continued discriminatory behaviour and kept up caste separation, and, related to this, with Syrian Christian landlords. Many Pulayas had then still the status of bonded labourers or even slaves (**p.xxxi**) (*adiyan*). Mentioning the activities of the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham (SJPS) established in 1907, in the context of which Christian Pulayas participated in agitations with the aim of overcoming such prohibitions as the ban on their entering government schools, walking on public roads, and removing the marks of caste degradation, Oommen puts the later involvement of Christian Pulayas with the Communist mobilization at the centre of his chapter. Starting with the movement of agricultural workers in the Travancore region of Kerala in the 1940s, he sees a new relationship emerging between high caste Communist activists, who were mainly young radicals, and the poor low caste labourers. The Communist activists, in stark contrast to the other Syrian Christians, including priests, accepted water and food from the Pulayas. Oommen follows this up by discussing the electoral success of the Communist Party in Kerala in 1957 and the 'Vimochana Samaram' of 1959 against the Communist government that involved church leaders and Syrian Christians and the push of Pulaya Christians for a distinctive depressed class administration within the Anglican Church, the Separate Administration Movement (SAM), ending with the break-away of a large section of Dalit Christians from the Anglican Church and the start of a new church, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) Church, in 1968, partly collaborating with another Syrian break-away group from the Mar Thomas Church. Oommen sees in this a failure of Dalit Christians to change the power structure within the Anglican Church. As Oommen argues, the Christian Pulayas did not identify the oppression of Syrian Christians with Christianity but rather with the Syrian Christian caste character and hierarchy.

In the final chapter, Martin Fuchs discusses the views of the most thorough socio-analytical thinker on religion in India, Bhimrao Ambedkar. Attacking the religious base of a society in which 'graded inequality' was engrained and considering alternative religious options, his project was one of a new

universalism of solidarity. At the same time, he was continuously reflecting and investigating the causes, mechanisms, and consequences of the agential and structural dimensions that cement segregation, criticizing the caste order for its lack of efficiency, for not allowing each individual to develop his or her capabilities, and, based on all of this, searching for an alternative. Fuchs systematically explores the sociological frame and **(p.xxxii)** socio-philosophical grounding of Ambedkar's thought, spelling out the guiding principles through which he approached human sociality (dispositional dimensions, the role of values and norms, the importance of the social imaginary, as well as the role of power and force), which were to lead him to conclude that religion was a necessity for society, not least under conditions of modernity. Religion for Ambedkar was social not just in the sense of collectively shared practices and ideas, but above all with respect to promoting a universalist idea(l) of humaneness and solidarity. For this, he employs a range of terms, including fellow-feeling and compassion, and the Buddhist ones of *maitri* and *karuna*. It is the basic social values or normative principles of equality, liberty, fraternity, and justice that give articulation to, even as they help develop, the moral universals.

Ambedkar countered his pessimism regarding the possibilities of imminent and effective social change with a principled optimism grounded in his assumptions about human nature. These referred to the ineradicable, commonly shared conditionalities of social life, a potentiality for sociality that in principle always exists, but is often blocked by circumstances, social forces of power and social dispositions, and thus has to be fostered or nurtured. Deeply inspired by John Dewey's pragmatist philosophy, Ambedkar combined a belief in the latency and ever-fresh emergence of new possibilities with trust in a basic universal humaneness and sociability, a ground of universality that represents the basic axes of human existence and allows for evaluating concrete forms of life: an ontology of transcendence and becoming. This has found the most adequate expression early on in history in the form of the teachings of the Buddha, or *dhamma*. It is up to humans to realize this moral order. Ambedkar too was out on the search for true religion. For him, it was the moral standard that is sacred and that replaces God—a post-religious religion. It is the principle that is inviolable, which to be effective has to be actualized in the everyday interactions of humans and in their attitudes towards each other. Unable to convince wider society to follow these aims, Ambedkar pursued the project of conversion to Buddhism of Dalits (only). However, with his magnum opus, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, he laid the ground for a social scheme that embraces all members of society, or all humans.

(p.xxxiii) Bibliography

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Notes:

(*) We left it to the contributors to decide on the transliteration scheme that most effectively responded to their own needs and individual preferences.

(¹) This was articulated in a particularly outspoken way by Castoriadis (1997, 17–18, 329).

(²) Cf., for example, Berger (1999).

(³) We also have to remember that secularizing conceptualizations and practices are not completely confined to the period we call modernity even in India, but have also come up in various contexts even earlier.

(⁴) Cf. Yack (1997) and Joas (2014, 67f).

(⁵) For example, Randeria, Fuchs, and Linkenbach (2004, 9–34).

(⁶) Subrahmanyam (1998); Randeria, Fuchs, and Linkenbach (2004); Dharampal-Frick and Banerjee (this volume).

(⁷) Giddens (1984, 284, 374).

(⁸) Suggested by Rüpke (2015), so as to avoid the metaphysically loaded and, in many instances, misleading term 'transcendental'.

(⁹) Ed. by Vasudha Dalmia and Munis D. Faruqui (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014).

(¹⁰) Subrahmanyam (1998) and the other contributions in the same issue of *Daedalus*, 127 (3); Ganeri (2011); among others.

(¹¹) Dalmia and Faruqui (2014, xxi); Dalmia (this volume).

(¹²) Dalmia and Faruqui (2014, xix).

(¹³) Dalmia and Faruqui (2014); Ganeri (2011); Subrahmanyam (1998).

(¹⁴) To take a term suggested by King (1999).

(¹⁵) Dvivedi (1973 [1936]), as quoted in Hawley (2015, 254).

(¹⁶) See Dalmia (1997) and Hawley (2015).

(¹⁷) See especially Nicholson (2011), who refers particularly to Vijnanabhikṣu and his promulgation of *bhedābheda* in the sixteenth century, and Minkowski (2012), who considers the networks of Advaita Vedāntins between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries and focuses especially on Madhusudana Sarasvatī, again sixteenth century.

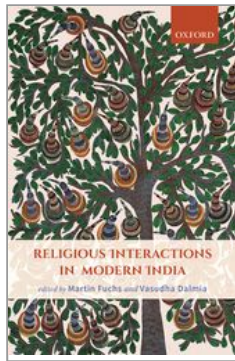
(¹⁸) Dalmia and Faruqi term the Mughal period ‘the golden age of bhakti literature’ (2015, xii).

(¹⁹) While the rise to fame of *sant bhakti* slightly predates this period, the sixteenth century saw the vigorous development of northern Krishna bhakti with the centre in Brāj.

(²⁰) Hawley (2015, chs 2 and 3).

(²¹) Dalmia (1997, 374, 380, 390).

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Between Complicit Entanglement and Creative Dissonance

William Wilberforce, Rammohun Roy, and Public Sphere Debates in the Early Nineteenth-Century Nexus between India and Britain

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Abstract and Keywords

Focusing on the nexus between Rammohun Roy's religious deliberations and William Wilberforce's religious policies, the chapter emphasizes the interconnections between the developments of the nineteenth-century public spheres in Britain and India. Wilberforce's intervention involved constructing a new model of Hinduism and the Hindu 'other' from the perspective of Anglo-Protestant Christianity. Rammohun Roy set a trajectory of transnational ethical-religious debate followed subsequently by other Indian public intellectuals. However, the meaning both gave to the term 'religion' differed. While Wilberforce regarded only one religion as authentic and true, Roy looked for the truth shared by all (elite) forms of religion. Starting with a comparative evaluation of different theological-religious traditions, he later integrated this with Enlightenment as well as Christian reformist and anti-Trinitarian vocabularies. At the same time, Roy shared the anti-idolatry penchant of Christian missionaries, while he undertook what the authors call a de-provincialization of Christian theology.

Keywords: Rammohun Roy, William Wilberforce, public spheres, Hinduism, Anglo-Protestant Christianity, anti-Trinitarian vocabularies, Enlightenment, de-provincialization

'A voice from India is heard in the interior of America, and a Brahmin is instructing Christians in their religion' (Zastoupil 2010, 50). Thus proclaimed Andrews Norton,¹ a prominent American Unitarian, in admiration of Rammohun Roy, the well-known Bengali reformer, who—simultaneous to his founding of the Brahmo Samaj (or Brahmo Sabha as it was initially called) in Bengal in 1828—was being heralded as a celebrity among British and American religious **(p.2)** dissenters, thanks to his incisive Biblical exegesis, thereby giving a crucial fillip to their own endeavours. This chapter traces the developments leading to this paradoxical happening, constituting a creative dissonance, as it were, in the arena of the ongoing British proselytization of its Indian colony; it highlights some of the complicit entanglements comprising this transcultural enterprise, and thereby aims to contribute towards underscoring the complexities of negotiating religious identities in the early nineteenth century. The configuration of emerging public sphere debates, as we show, was eventually to be characterized by a sense of multiple affiliations, being based on dialogues between precolonial or 'early modern' dynamics of change and colonial institutional transformations, and embedded in a public interplay between the questioning of religious certitudes and the utilization of religious paradigms. The notion of nexus is useful in conceptualizing the interlinked encounter and symbiotic formation of these public spheres within a transcontinental conjuncture.

Needless to say, not only is the rationale behind this endeavour somewhat circuitous, but it seems also to necessitate a multi-pronged approach which can be delineated as follows: The initial focus will be on early nineteenth-century missionary discourse and its genesis in the entangled history between the colonial metropolis and its colonized periphery, constituting as this did a 'unitary field of analysis' (Cohn 1996, 4), albeit determined by political asymmetries. Second, in citing the exemplary case of William Wilberforce's parliamentary speech propagating the Christianization of India, the former's exemplary function in the shape of a public sphere document shall be underscored, thereby highlighting the significance of rhetoric as a strategic medium for instigating a paradigm shift in colonial policies, arbitrated by the British Parliament, which constituted a quintessential public sphere institution, for reasons cited later. Third, whilst acknowledging the far-reaching repercussions of missionary discourse on Hindu self-definition and subsequent movements of religious reform, in an attempt to take this reading a step further, it will be elucidated how this influential impact sparked off a counter-discourse among Bengali intellectuals of the early nineteenth century, in whose ranks Rammohun Roy figured prominently. Yet, fourth, in view of the culturally entangled scenario, another perspective will be accentuated to give serious credence to the cultural and intellectual **(p.3)** background of Rammohun:² his independently expressed critical reflections against religious dogma will be highlighted, for they were formulated prior to his contact with British officialdom and missionary

representatives; it will be argued that this critical stance not only belied a certain objective congruency (albeit determined by divergent ideational motivation) with the anti-idolatrous missionary invective, but also enabled him to intervene innovatively in British debates on religion from the 1820s onwards. Fifth, Rammohun's hermeneutic multidimensionality, arising out of this contentious intercultural encounter in the Bengal periphery, besides climaxing in the foundation of the Brahmo movement, will be shown to rebound on constellations in the British metropolis and further afield.

The broader theoretical argument proffered here revolves around the importance of religious debate in the making of transcontinental 'modern' public spheres in early nineteenth-century Britain and India. The concept of 'public sphere'—as classically outlined by Jürgen Habermas (2009)—has come under critique from South Asianists such as C.A. Bayly (1996) and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (1998) for being over-fixated on a Eurocentric (and ultimately Marxist teleology-driven) framework that does not do adequate justice to the evolutionary trajectory of public sphere institutions in India. To substantiate their critical perspective, these historians have focused on precolonial Indic and Indo-Islamic structures which supposedly paralleled Western European developments. Bayly's latest book underlines the 'multiple enlightenments' (Bayly 2012, 38) in late precolonial India that preceded and subverted the public sphere apparatus introduced by colonial liberalism. Situated at some distance from this line of enquiry, but equally important for our purposes, is Lynn Zastoupil's study (2010) which demonstrates in empirical detail the contributions of Rammohun to the making of public sphere debates in early nineteenth-century Britain and, through the transatlantic transfer of press reports and religious networks, in the New World, as well.

Taking these diverse, and admittedly somewhat fragmented, interventions as our point of departure, we wish to suggest that nascent modern public spheres in the early nineteenth century had multiple **(p.4)** transcontinental lineages and affiliations, and that religious polemics had a greater role to play in over-determining as well as subverting these public sphere constructions than existing theoretical consensus (with its origins in Habermas) would acknowledge. By deploying intellectual resources generated by the two blind spots of Marxian-liberal visions of secular bourgeois modernity—namely religion and the non-West—this chapter also advocates an immanent critique of 'modernity's' homogenizing and bounded definitions which effectively erase the complexities of historical moments and processes. It is suggested that rather than framing the emergence of public spheres in the subcontinent in terms of the transfer of prefabricated models from Britain to South Asia, it is more fruitful to think of the emergence of public spheres in terms of a transcontinental conjuncture, marked by the crossroads encounter and nexus of competing universalizing ideological agendas emanating from Britain and India, with these agendas, in turn, straddling the divide between early modernity and

the nineteenth century. Moreover, an analysis of the languages of affect and disputation—including exegetical polemics and irony—deployed by Wilberforce and Rammohun can increase awareness of the stylistic parameters that framed their public debates, and which are often obscured in scholarship predicated solely on the analysis of ideological content.

To engage with the developments in Britain and to graphically highlight the nature of its entanglement with India, our spotlight is directed on William Wilberforce (1759–1833), celebrated abolitionist and heralded ‘father’ of the Victorians (cf. Brown 1961; Oldfield 2007; Peterson 2010; Page 2011), who could also be viewed as a prominent British counterpart to Rammohun Roy (1782–1833), considered the ‘father of modern India’. Moreover, stressing the former’s significant role as *spiritus rector* (ruling or guiding spirit) behind the British proselytization of the Indian subcontinent is imperative, given that this fact is often ignored in general histories concerned almost exclusively with Wilberforce’s torch-bearing role in the abolitionist movement. Indeed, his role as chief propagator for the Christianization of India in the British parliamentary debates (taking place in the House of **(p.5)** Commons in June–July 1813 and constituting an essential part of the deliberations to renew the East India Company’s [EIC] charter) not only testifies paradigmatically to the collusion of interests between the missionary agenda and the colonial project, but also exemplifies the ideational linkage between the abolitionist movement and the proselytization drive. These two temporarily overlapping activist movements had in common certain shared ideological underpinnings, which were partly determined by the home context, and partly arose out of being implicated in interventions in the global arena.

The ulterior causative factors engendering the proselytization movement originated on the home front, whilst being complicit with British intervention in India. Wilberforce, as a founding member of the so-called Clapham sect, and as chief proponent of British evangelicalism, propagated the regeneration of British Protestant Christianity. One of the major supportive pillars of this evangelical project was the imperative to convert overseas pagans, and to wage a ‘battle against idolatry’ in ‘an endeavour to save heathen souls’ (Veer 2001, 35). Over and above such a vicariously oriented agenda of ‘atonement’, this activist religious movement was also intimately tied to the Enlightenment legacy. Echoing ‘rational’ utilitarian principles (in the mode of Jeremy Bentham and James Mill),³ Wilberforce, at the forefront of the evangelical movement, contributed towards moulding emerging British citizens in line with a Christian ethos, imbuing them with a sense of progress and the vision of a ‘mission in the world’. While defining the individual in terms of his/her social and moral responsibility, this modernist and progressive outlook was coupled with a proselytizing thrust which drew sustenance from traditional theological notions of sin and retribution. That this combination of ideologically divergent epistemes was successful in initiating the mushrooming of **(p.6)** anti-slavery, bible, and

missionary societies around 1800 is manifest, albeit ironical, since these societies contributed towards creating a modern public sphere through which the national civic society would be configured (Veer 2001, 34–5). Furthermore, the dual endeavour to save the British soul and to constitute the British citizen was intimately linked with the colonially implicated missionary agenda. As formulated by Peter van der Veer: ‘The Christian self in nineteenth-century Britain is formed in connection to the ‘white man’s burden’ in India, missionary and colonial’ (Veer 2001, 28–9). This complicit entanglement constituted the foundational building bricks for the emergence of British modernity—a modernity which was charged, from the very beginning, with a religious fervour. Defined by a reductionist belief that pagans, living in darkness without the blessings of Christian light, had to be saved, this inherent cognitive dissonance at the initiatory moment of the British modernity project was to strike a chord of resilient resistance in the hearts of so-called pagan intellectuals.

Yet, despite its purportedly progressive reformist agenda, evangelical proselytizing zeal was met with scepticism by the EIC hierarchy, and even outright hostility from some quarters, due to apprehension and anxiety about the negative impact of missionary intervention. It was feared that missionary efforts would cause unnecessary upheaval in India, as concretely exemplified by the Vellore Mutiny of July 1806, just to name one important incident at the beginning of the nineteenth century.⁴ So it was by no means plain sailing for the evangelicals. Opposition, however, spurred on activism: ever since Wilberforce’s first parliamentary speech in favour of proselytization as early as 1793, a wide-scale petitioning campaign had been endeavouring to gain support for this cause, leading, in turn, to massive mobilization of public opinion. Polemical diatribes appeared in missionary tracts penned by Charles Grant (one of the directors of the EIC), Claudius (p.7) Buchanan (chaplain of the EIC), and the missionary trio, William Carey, Joshua Marshman, and William Ward, who had been operating from the Danish colony of Serampore in Bengal since the 1790s, yet without having a foothold in British Bengal. Circulated widely in India (especially in Bengal) and England for over two decades, these tracts provided dense networks of ideological flow in the transcontinental public sphere debates that linked the British metropolis and Indian colony (Copland 2006). Constituting crucial arsenal for Wilberforce, this missionary discourse was synthesized and presented with rhetorical finesse to the British House of Commons in two well-publicized, and extremely long, speeches delivered on 22 June and 1 July 1813,⁵ whose evangelical modes of argumentation have a heuristic value in so far as they exemplify the discursive mechanisms by which an axial shift in the ideological basis of colonial rule was brought about. Significantly, they also contributed to the construction of a paradigmatic model of Hinduism from the perspective of Anglo-Protestant Christianity: the formation of the modern Christian self was mirrored in the articulation of its antithesis, the Hindu ‘other’.

Furthermore, the very locus of Wilberforce's speech, the British Parliament, facilitates a critical discussion of the emergent public sphere in modern Britain which, according to Habermas, provides 'the model case', as elaborated in the following citation:

A public sphere that functioned in the political realm arose first in Great Britain at the turn of the eighteenth century. Forces endeavouring to influence the decisions of state authority appealed to the critical public in order to legitimate demands before this new forum. In connection with this practice, the assembly of estates became transformed into a modern parliament—a process that was, of course, drawn out over the entire century. (Habermas 2009, 57)

However, the supposedly 'rational-critical debate' (Habermas 2009, 58), which is privileged in this interpretation, we would argue, was in fact entangled with emotionally charged religious rhetoric. Wilberforce's speeches, addressed to the British Parliament, which—in the Habermasian model—constitutes the exemplar par excellence of the political manifestation of the public sphere, demonstrate this **(p.8)** entanglement. His oratorical communications thus became public sphere interventions to mould debate, indeed to fashion rational-critical opinion about moral and material development, while simultaneously remaining closely engaged with certain a priori assumptions about the certitudes of Anglo-Protestant Christian faith. This intertwining of faith and critical debate—which, in Wilberforce's case, fed into each other—is symptomatic of the interconnected public spheres that would emerge in Britain and India, moulded to a significant extent by imperial interventions. In other words, 'rational-critical debate' could not exist in a conceptual vacuum, but rather it was surcharged with theological faith. Bearing this in mind, the nexus of early nineteenth-century British and Indian public spheres, as exemplified by Wilberforce and Rammohun, assumes greater significance.

Within this intellectual atmosphere, the persuasive argumentative style of Wilberforce's speeches, which aimed to instigate a change in colonial policy, was framed with rhetorical finesse in order to achieve maximal emotional and psychological effect. It comprised a tripartite thrust, consisting of, first, a diagnostic mode to identify the 'problem', second, a prognostic mode to suggest remedial solutions and strategies, and third, a motivational mode to rationalize a call for action. Argumentation assumed the form of a hermeneutical circle, whereby the interpretation of the text as a whole was 'established' by reference to the individual parts, and the understanding of each individual part by reference to the whole. Needless to say, appearance of textual self-sufficiency was embedded in the text's cultural, historical, and literary context, and in particular in the overarching social-political motives of colonial proselytization.

Commencing in a diagnostic mode, Wilberforce employed oratorical skill to impress upon the assembled MPs the importance of the topic:

And now, Sir, let me enter into the discussion, by assuring the House, that there never was a subject which better deserved the attention of a British parliament than that on which we are now deliberating. Immense regions, with a population amounting, as we are assured, to sixty millions of souls, have providentially come under our dominion. (Hansard 1813, 833–4)

By underscoring the divine-providential hand at play, the military conquest of India was glossed over, or rather became teleologically integrated into a scenario of Christian global expansion. Then, **(p.9)** Wilberforce proceeded with a stigmatizing diagnosis, simultaneously alluding to the motivational factor for proselytization as well as providing ideological legitimation and sanction for subsequent destruction incurred:

They are deeply sunk, and by their religious superstitions fast bound, in the lowest depths of moral and social wretchedness and degradation. Must we not then be prompted by every motive, and urged by every feeling that can influence the human heart, to endeavour to raise these wretched beings out of their present miserable condition, and above all to communicate to them those blessed truths which would not only improve their understandings and elevate their minds, but would, in ten thousand ways, promote their temporal well-being, and point out to them a sure path to everlasting happiness? (Hansard 1813, 834)

‘Wretchedness and degradation’ have moral-religious connotations: Indians are considered to be in this state since they are bereft of Christian enlightenment. Hence, the evangelical Christian is bound by a moral duty to elevate and enlighten them with ‘blessed truths’, to achieve a religious awakening from sin and retribution. Yet, to tackle the anti-missionary lobby head-on, Wilberforce proceeded by forthrightly naming their objections:

[...] our opponents had maintained, that we were bringing forward an unnecessary, nay a most pernicious project; that the principles of the Hindoo religion were eminently pure, their practice superior to our own; but, were this more doubtful, that the endeavour could not be made without endangering the very existence of our empire in India. (Hansard 1813, 1078)

These opinions he countered stringently in a prognostic mode:

[...] the state of our East Indian Empire is such as to render it highly desirable to introduce among them the blessings of Christian light and moral improvement; that the idea of its being impracticable to do this is contrary alike to reason and to experience; that the attempt, if conducted

prudently and cautiously, may be made with perfect safety to our political interests; nay, more, that it is the very course by which those interests may be most effectually promoted and secured; does it not follow from these premises as an irresistible conclusion, that we are clearly bound, nay, imperiously and urgently compelled, by the strongest obligations of duty, to support the proposition for which I now call upon you for your assent. (Hansard 1813, 1070–1)

(p.10) In short, proselytization was desirable and possible; it was not dangerous, but rather conducive to furthering British interests. ‘Reason’ dictated that India be Christianized for it to become an integral part of the *imperium*. But in order to strengthen his case and to forcefully negate the hitherto positive opinion held about Hindus, Wilberforce itemized their vilification, diagnostically, as follows:

Their minds are totally uncultivated; of the duties of morality they have no idea; they possess in a great degree that low cunning which so generally accompanies depravity of heart. They are indolent and grossly sensual; they are cruel and cowardly, insolent and abject. They have superstitions without a sense of religion; and in short they have all the vices of savage life, without any of its virtues. (Hansard 1813, 848)

The pivotal conceptual frame is that of true ‘religion’, which Christian England possesses and India does not. It is in this sense that the interconnected—transcontinentally linked and symbiotically recreated—public spheres of the early nineteenth century, in Britain and in India, would be structurally influenced by the debate on the presence or absence of ‘true religion’ as a determining criterion of civilization. To underscore this abysmal state, Wilberforce dwells at length on reports of *suttee*⁶ ‘the burning of widows on the funeral pile of their deceased husbands’ (Hansard 1813, 859), whereby his estimate of 10,000 annual immolations in Bengal alone far exceeds the official British reports of around 500–800 a year (Mani 1998, 21). Further, reference to the cult of Jagannatha worship at Puri, a focal point for Vaishnava devotion in eastern India, serves to highlight ‘the various obscene and bloody rites of their idolatrous ceremonies, with all their unutterable abominations’ (Hansard 1813, 862). This leads Wilberforce to epitomize the difference between ‘them’ and ‘us’, predicated on a difference of moral religion: ‘Their divinities are absolute monsters of lust, injustice, wickedness and cruelty. In short, their religious system is one grand abomination’ (Hansard 1813, 864). The style of debate through which the public sphere was being constituted in the early nineteenth century was thus enunciated on an agonistic mode of self-articulation along **(p. 11)** Manichean lines, as exemplified by Wilberforce’s apodictic conclusion: ‘Our religion is sublime, pure and beneficent. Theirs is mean, licentious, and cruel’ (Hansard 1813, 865). Yet, the subtext of this argumentation comprised an ambivalent instability concerning the absence/presence of religion in the public

sphere: India either lacked religion—only displaying superstition—or when religion is ascribed to the Indian sphere, it was only a degraded version of that phenomenon. This universalization of the category of religion as handmaiden to the British Empire inevitably implied universalizing the religious subject, as well; for if the Indian lacked religion, or practised a perverse version of it, he/she, nonetheless, had the potential—thanks to the very openness of his/her own religious affiliation—to be transformed into a proper *homo religiosus*, that is, the Indian could be converted through colonial pastoral care:

Sir, I boldly affirm, that this position, that their attachment to their own institutions is so fixed that it cannot be overcome, is a gross error, abundantly falsified by much, and even by recent, experience. (Hansard 1813, 834)

[...]there is nothing in the nature or principles of a Hindoo which renders it impossible for him to become a Christian. (Hansard 1813, 836)

Yet, as shall be evident later, the supposed openness of the Indian's religious worldview could also be used as a technique for resisting the monopoly of Christian truth, an option of which Rammohun would avail himself.

In his speech, Wilberforce, however, persuasively expounds:

Providence has provided sufficient means for rescuing them from the depths in which they are now sunk, and I now call on you to open the way for their application; for to us, Sir, I confidently hope, is committed the honourable office of removing the barrier which now excludes the access of Christian light, with its long train of attendant blessings, into that benighted land, and thus, of ultimately cheering their desolate hearts with the beams of heavenly truth, and love, and consolation. (Hansard 1813, 854)

Evangelical imperialism offered the hope of regeneration to the colonized: empire became a project of achieving salvation. Yet this could be facilitated only because, according to Wilberforce, the nature of rationality was innately Christian:

(p.12) When truth and reason, so long excluded from that benighted land, shall once more obtain access to it, (and we are this day engaged in the great work of breaking down that barrier which has hitherto substantially and practically excluded them), the understandings of the natives will begin to exert their powers; and their minds, once enlightened, will instinctively reject the profane absurdities of their theological, and the depraving vices of their moral system. Thus they will be prepared for the reception of Christianity, for Christianity is a reasonable service, and then, we may appeal to the moral superiority of Christian Europe in modern

times, in comparison with that of the most polished pagan communities, for the blessed effects which may be expected to follow on their moral, their social, and, above all, their domestic comfort. (Hansard 1813, 1076–7)

Underscoring the need for a diplomatic strategy, Wilberforce combined prognostic ardour with a motivational political rationale grounded in the material interests of the colonizers:

[...] if we proceed with that prudence and caution with which all such measures should be conducted, the endeavour to communicate to our fellow-subjects in India, the benefits of Christian light and moral improvement may not only be made without danger, but what is more, that there is no way whatever by which we should be so likely to promote our political interests in India; because there is no other way by which we should so greatly strengthen the foundations of our government in that country. (Hansard 1813, 867–8)

[...] I have irrefragably proved, that the state of our East Indian empire is such as to render it highly desirable to introduce among them the blessings of Christian light and moral improvement; that the idea of its being impracticable to do this is contrary alike to reason and to experience; that the attempt, if conducted prudently and cautiously, may be made with perfect safety to our political interests; nay, more, that it is the very course by which those interests may be most effectually promoted and secured; does it not follow from these premises as an irresistible conclusion, that we are clearly bound, nay, imperiously and urgently compelled, by the strongest obligations of duty, to support the proposition for which I now call upon you for your assent. (Hansard 1813, 1070–1)

The emerging interconnected social-political system was thus to be based on ensuring domestic comfort, while simultaneously its foundations rested squarely on Christian dogma and the acceptance of an apparently consensual imperial authority structure, secured by **(p.13)** religious—or more broadly ideological—conversion. Contrastively, for Habermas, it is rational-critical deliberation—exemplified, as we have seen, by the British Parliament—that constitutes an inalienable aspect of the emergence of the modern public sphere. Hence, what we wish to underscore here is that, in the case of Wilberforce's parliamentary speeches, the formation, and even more clearly, the acceptance of deliberation, rests on persuasion, and indeed on intellectual domination and the solicitation of affection for the ruler. This domination requires religious faith to secure itself. In a sense, rational-critical deliberation, in itself, appears to be insufficient; it needs faith to guard itself.

In truth, Sir, are we at this time of day still to be taught that most important lesson, that no government can be really secure which does not

rest on the affections of the governed; or at least on their persuasion that its maintenance and preservation are in some degree connected with their own well-being? (Hansard 1813, 1068)

Employing a classical agricultural metaphor to emphasize the organic process of colonial state-making, Wilberforce considers the implanting of Christianity as constituting the ultimate foundation for consolidating colonial sovereignty, thereby transforming empire from a rootless top-down power hierarchy to a 'field' of enracinated power relations.

[...] let us endeavour to strike our roots into the soil, by the gradual introduction and establishment of our own principles and opinions; of our own laws, institutions, and manners; above all, as the source of every other improvement, of our religion, and consequently of our morals. (Hansard 1813, 1069)

Pre-empting Macaulay's 'Minute on Education' of 1835, here is implied an endeavour to naturalize Christianity—including modern European ideologies—so that Anglo-European Christian discourses would become subliminally accepted by Indian minds, without conscious reflection, and therefore would not be questioned or destabilized. An education in morals would serve not simply as a 'mask of conquest' (Viswanathan 1989), but, more significantly, as the reality of conquest itself:

By enlightening the minds of the natives, we should root out their errors, without provoking their prejudices; and it would be impossible **(p.14)** that men of enlarged and instructed minds could continue enslaved by such a monstrous system of follies and superstitions as that under the yoke of which the natives of Hindostan now groan. They would, in short, become Christians, if I may so express myself, without knowing it. (Hansard 1813, 832–3)

Why, Sir, if it were only that we should thereby render the subjects of our Asiatic empire a distinct and peculiar people; that we should create a sort of moral and political oasis in the vast expanse of the Asiatic regions, and amidst the unnumbered myriads of its population, by this change we should render our East Indian dominions more secure, merely from the natural desire which men feel to preserve their own institutions, solely because they are their own, from invaders who would destroy them. (Hansard 1813, 1069)

To conclude his speech, by rhetorically appealing to British national pride, and exuding confidence in the beneficent privilege of gifting Christianity to India, Wilberforce predicted the establishment of an enduring political relationship of dependency, strengthened by ties of gratitude:

[...] are we so little aware of the vast superiority even of European laws and institutions, and far more of British laws and institutions, over these of Asia, as not to be prepared to predict with confidence, that the Indian community which should have exchanged its dark and bloody superstitions for the genial influence of Christian light and truth, would have experienced such an increase of civil order and security; of social pleasures and domestic comforts, as to be desirous of preserving the blessings it should have acquired; and can we doubt that it would be bound even by the ties of gratitude to those who had been the honoured instruments of communicating them? (Hansard 1813, 1069)

By correlating British laws and institutions with the Christian mission, Wilberforce attempted to influence the direction of colonial policy through his evangelically coloured vision. It was to a large extent due to his forceful argumentation, based on a compelling appeal to patriotic Christian sentiments of political and religious superiority coupled with benevolent obligation, that the motion put forward by Wilberforce was passed,⁷ thus opening the gates for evangelizing the **(p.15)** subcontinent. More significantly, the tenor of Wilberforce's speeches set the tone for an ideological change in colonial policy, paving the way for James Mill's *History of British India* (first published in 1817), and Thomas Macaulay's educational initiative to acculturate Indians to European civilization—with all their enduring repercussions. Notwithstanding British Christianity's inability to convert sizeable numbers of Indians, evangelicalism as such, in its intertwining of Christian ethics, imperial authority, and modernity, structured the basic contours of debate in which Indians would have to participate. To challenge empire, Indians would now have to challenge the British imperial version of religion itself.

In an endeavour to appreciate the extent to which Christian missionary discourse with its universalizing assumptions (exemplified by Wilberforce) was confronted by an alternate universalizing agenda based on the supposed commonalities at the moral core of all 'higher' forms of religiosity, we shall now turn to Rammohun Roy, the prominent Brahmin, active in Bengal at the seat of British India. This, in turn, will help us delineate not only the nexus of overlapping and competing transcontinental public spheres which were generated by the milieus of Wilberforce and Rammohun, but also the sets of convergent and dissonant assumptions about universalistic and critical ethics that they produced in order to advance projects of personal and social reform.

Given the paradigmatic nature of Wilberforce's speeches (their content being analogous to the religio-political vocabularies employed widely in missionary literature of the early nineteenth century, such as penned by Baptist missionaries⁸), Rammohun must have been very **(p.16)** familiar with the essence of the speeches, all the more so since, quite tellingly, he had been closely associated with the Serampore Baptist missionaries. And yet their

relationship was not free from tension, especially concerning discussions on religious conversion. Basically, the category of religion did not possess quite the same meaning for Rammohun as it did for the missionaries and indeed for Wilberforce. The reasons for this divergence have to do with the specificity of the colonial situation in India, and the imperative for Rammohun to attempt a de-provincialization, or even decolonization, of religion. But it also has to do with the precolonial lineages of Rammohun's world view, and hence an examination of this latter domain—with all its circuitous complexities and entanglements with the colonial developments—is required.

Admittedly, Wilberforce's public parliamentary forum was not directly available to Indian religious reformers in the context of imperial asymmetries, yet, as highlighted paradigmatically by Rammohun's case, a combination of precolonial structures of public disputation and colonial-European forms of association along with print politics could be employed to articulate divergent views; in short, through polemical exegesis, argumentation, and irony, the categories and contents of discursive debates could be transnationalized. Availing himself of these resources, Rammohun, in particular, was able to reach out ultimately to British parliamentary politics itself with the aim of linking his Indian and European agendas of reform. Moreover, the congruency between the South Asian formats of disputation and the Anglo-European modes of public sphere debate, in terms of the focus on religion as well as on the multilateral nature of argumentation, will become clear once we juxtapose and relate the different arenas of debate through which Rammohun operated. Similarly, the new opportunities offered by the Anglo-European world of print in enlarging the audience of public debate assume historical depth when seen in conjunction with pre-existing South Asian structures of interpretative and satirical oral and textual knowledge exchange.

(p.17) As mentioned earlier, some attention has been brought to bear upon the formation of 'public spheres' in late precolonial or 'early modern' India. While an earlier generation of historians was content to focus on the ideological-social ramifications of religious change, more recent works have argued for giving importance to the performative nature of religious debate (cf. Alam 2011; Hawley 2011; Novetzke 2007; Novetzke 2008; Novetzke 2011; O'Hanlon and Washbrook 2011). Taking a cue from these suggestions, it would be important to re-evaluate the nature of South Asian public debates on morality and religion in which Rammohun took an active part; and this, all the more so, since, surprisingly, the dynamic worlds of debating in early modern Bengal, as well as the links between the precolonial and the colonial debating traditions, have received little attention in spite of their obvious importance to the emergence of Indian 'modernity'. Whereas the main aspects of these 'early modern' intellectual strands in Rammohun have been anticipated previously (Banerjee 2009a), the focus here is on the structural-institutional, stylistic, and regional

contexts within which the debates were played out. Thereby, our aim is to locate the transnational roots of Rammohun's intellectual endeavours.

Rammohun engaged with two interlocking ecumenes of debate. On the one hand, there was the Persian language arena of argumentation which, by the late Mughal period, had started being increasingly used by non-Muslim Indian literati. On the other hand, there was the Sanskritic-Bengali domain of debate. Both spheres allowed geographical mobility and intellectual scope for members from the multilingual scribal literati groups, whose rise has been identified as one of the most significant features of Mughal India (cf. Chatterjee 2010; O'Hanlon and Washbrook 2010). Intellectual debates in both spheres again were marked by complex negotiations between pre-existing hermeneutic cultures and novel ways of interpreting cultural-social issues which arose out of concrete material changes in lifeworlds.

As exemplified by the sole Persian treatise authored by Rammohun extant today, the *Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin* (1803–4), the author's perspective reflected his wide-ranging travels through northern India, Bhutan, and Tibet, though exact details of these travels remain mired in controversy (Biswas 1994, 9–10 and 38). Such opportunities for wide travel which facilitated exposure to Indic and Islamic methods of **(p.18)** debate in centres in Bengal and beyond, such as Patna and Benares, were themselves to a large extent a product of the intensified expansion of travel and communication opportunities offered by Mughal rule; for though travel and scholarship mutually enriched each other in earlier periods too, the late Mughal age saw a remarkable acceleration of these trends. Geographical mobility and early modern migration created the conditions for ideological relativity. In the *Tuhfat*, Rammohun discussed different religious traditions he had encountered to suggest that, given the differences between these traditions, they were either all false or all true. His conclusion was that falsehood was common to all religions, since they all contradicted each other, as explicit in the following important quote:

I travelled in the remotest parts of the world, in plains as well as in hilly lands, and I found the inhabitants thereof agreeing generally in believing in the existence of one Being, who is the source of creation and the governor of it, and disagreeing in giving particular attributes to that Being and in holding different creeds consisting of the doctrines of religion and precepts about what is Haram (forbidden) and Halal (legal). By induction from this it has been known to me that turning generally towards One Eternal Being, is like a natural tendency in human beings and is common to all individuals of mankind equally. And the inclination of each sect of mankind to a particular God or gods, holding certain special attributes, and to some peculiar forms of worship or devotion is an excrescent quality grown (in mankind) by custom and training. What a vast difference is there between nature and custom! Some of these sectaries are ready to confute

the creeds of others owing to a disagreement with them, believing in the truth of the sayings of their (ancient) predecessors; while these predecessors also like other men were liable to commit sins and mistakes. Hence, all those sectaries (in claiming the truth of their own religions) are either true or false. In the former case, the two contradictories come together (which is logically inadmissible) and in the latter case, either falsehood is to be imputed to a certain religion in particular or to all in common; in the first case *Tarjih bila Murajjeh*, i.e., giving preference without there being any reason for it (which is logically inadmissible) follows. Hence falsehood is common to all religions without distinction. (Roy n.d., 3-4)

The only true ideology one could subscribe to was that of belief in one God and love for all mankind (Banerjee 2009a, 45-51; Roy n.d.). **(p.19)** This treatise embroiled him in virulent controversy with the Zoroastrian community, as can be seen from the Persian treatise *Jawab-i-Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin* (Biswas 1994, 575-98).

Rammohun maintained his links with the Persophone world for quite a long time; prominent members of the Persian-speaking Muslim literati of Calcutta supported his career ambitions (Chanda and Majumdar 1938, 43). Rammohun's Persian language newspaper *Mirat-ul-Akhbar*, founded in 1822 to cater to Persian-speaking people, especially of northern India, became a significant part of Bengal's public sphere debates, until Rammohun closed it in 1823 after a radical protest against the British government's moves to curb the freedom of the press in India (Majumdar 1941, 294-323). As the name of the newspaper indicates, and as further shown by Rammohun's nostalgic praise of the precolonial *akhbar*, or newsletter, tradition as a check on governmental power (and notably in protest against the colonial state's press censorship laws), Rammohun located himself squarely in a pre-existing Mughal tradition of news distribution (Fisher 1993; Roy 1973, 526). Even after the *Mirat's* closure, Rammohun maintained correspondence with Persian literati, and desired to visit Persia (and also Turkey), a project which was cut short by his untimely death in 1833 (Biswas 1994, 6). Baptist Christian missionaries reported that Rammohun had come to be regarded in Bengal as a 'Mouluvee' (Collet 1914, 29), a term normally reserved for Muslim scholars.

The pugnacious mode of religious-social debate pioneered in the *Tuhfat* was to be continued in his later Bengali and Sanskrit treatises, which dwelt on all the issues concerning Rammohun's public campaigns, including the abolition of suttee,⁹ the advancement of Hindu **(p.20)** religious reforms based on monotheism, the rejection of 'idolatry', and the promotion of disciplined moral behaviour (Roy 1973).¹⁰ The formal structure of these treatises takes the form of the *vichara* and *samvada*, terms which connote in Sanskrit, as well as Bengali, the model of disputation and dialogue leading to judgment. The nature of

evidence in Rammohun's treatises was based on the exegesis of Indian scriptures as well as on non-scriptural observations about society through argumentative inferences. These forms of disputation emerged from the Sanskritic-Brahminical and Bhakti-Vaishnava modes of argumentation as prevalent in precolonial Bengal, through which early modern scholars engaged in debates to ascertain the nature of truth and, in a related manner, the way society ought to be governed 'righteously'. In the pre-print world, these controversies took place both in 'live' public disputations as well as in written texts. **(p.21)** The disputations were important performative acts, and this polemical debating tone structured the textualization of the debates. With the arrival of print, published texts continued this same stylistic genre, as is evident from Rammohun's printed books engaging in arguments with Brahminical and Vaishnava scholars. However, it must be borne in mind that these treatises were not simply texts addressed to a distanced scholarly debater, but were produced by personalized exchange of replies and counter-replies in public contexts. The disputes with Vaishnava scholars—carried out through an entanglement of Sanskritic argumentation and negotiation of Bhakti modes about discussing the presence and discernment of the divine in the world—offer good examples of this structured formation.¹¹ It must be admitted, though, that the interface between Rammohun and the Vaishnava scholars also comprised ruptures. Thus, in his debate with Rammohun, while the Vaishnava scholar Utsavananda Vidyavagisha invoked Bhakti forms of devotional modes of conceptualizing divinity, Rammohun himself sometimes sidestepped these issues, preferring to focus more on the intellectualized nuances of public argumentation (Roy 1973, 85–106, 692–713). It is likely that this in itself had deeper long-term repercussions in increasingly giving public disputation a greater textual slant in colonial Bengal, and in subtly marginalizing some of its more affective features.

Tellingly enough, Rammohun's Bengali language newspaper, a pioneer in Indian journalism, was named the *Samvada Kaumudi*.¹² Apart from the above-mentioned aspects of Rammohun's involvement in the South Asian world of debate, one must also highlight the structure of *dal*-led (literally, party or faction) disputation, which had been a characteristic feature of Bengali society at least since the mid-eighteenth century. This aided Rammohun to convert his intellectual debates into orchestrated public campaigns in the Bengali public sphere of Calcutta in the early nineteenth century **(p.22)** (Mukherjee 1975). Further, Ajitkumar Ghosh, the scholar of Bengali language and literature, notes the presence of *shlesha*, *vakra mantavya*, *vakra ukti*, and *vyanga* in Rammohun's Bengali and Sanskrit works, and especially in *Bhattacharyer Sahita Vichara* and *Pathya Pradana* (Roy 1973, xxix, xxxiii–xxxiv, xxxviii). Roughly, these terms, as used in modern Bengali, convey the sense of sharp irony, satirical insinuation, and witty repartees articulated through oblique responses. Apart from *Bhattacharyer Sahita Vichara* and *Pathya Pradana*, illustrations can also be found in *Gosvami Sahita Vichara* (for example, Roy 1973, 160) and *Pravartaka o*

Nivartaker Dvitiya Samvada (for example, Roy 1973, 198–9). Examples of his opponents using irony to critique Rammohun include *Vedantachandrika* (for example, Roy 1973, 615, 628) and *Pashandapirana* (for example, Roy 1973, 671–2, 677).

The use of irony and satire to refute one's opponents had at least two main sources in the public sphere in which Rammohun operated (cf. Banerjee 2009b). First, there was the Sanskritic tradition of satire, for instance, as present in the *prahasana* genre of drama, which was very popular in early modern Bengal, and which often dwelt on ideological controversies. A second source was in the popular vernacular world of Bengali-language humour, particularly as used by non-scholarly poets. The writings of Ishwar Gupta (1812–59), a famous Bengali poet and journalist, in charge of the Bengali newspaper *Samvada Prabhakara*, demonstrate the links between this popular world of satirical humour and the emergence of a modern Bengali argumentative sphere, as well as the continuities between Sanskritic humour and Bengali political wit. The importance of humour seems to have, however, gradually lost a measure of centrality in the Bengali argumentative tradition, a phenomenon related to colonial angst about obscenity in public life, as British and Bengali elites came together to impose new modes of social discipline (Banerjee 1987; Banerjee 2009b). Rammohun, in particular, accused his Indian opponents of uncontrolled and improper use of satire and irony.¹³

(p.23) In spite of continuities between the precolonial and colonial modern world of argumentation, there also exist significant chronological ruptures, evident, for instance, in the divergences between the *Tuhfat* and Rammohun's later Bengali, Sanskrit, and English debates. The debating structure in the *Tuhfat* tended to be anti-ideological, or even 'anarchic', predicated on the falsity intrinsic to all religions. By contrast, in the post-*Tuhfat* writings, Rammohun's position increasingly approached that of a builder of a system. The key to this transition can be found in his introduction to the *Translation of the Cena Upanishad* (1823).

I have often lamented that, in our general researches into theological truth, we are subjected to the conflict of many obstacles. When we look to the traditions of ancient nations, we often find them at variance with each other; and when, discouraged by this circumstance, we appeal to reason as a surer guide, we soon find how incompetent it is, alone, to conduct us to the object of our pursuit. We often find that, instead of facilitating our endeavours or clearing up our perplexities, it only serves to generate a universal doubt, incompatible with principles on which our comfort and happiness mainly depend. The best method perhaps is, neither to give ourselves up exclusively to the guidance of the one or the other; but by a proper use of the lights furnished by both, endeavour to improve our intellectual and moral faculties, relying on the goodness of the Almighty

Power, which alone enables us to attain that which we earnestly and diligently seek for. (Roy 1901a, 50)

The above passage reflects the anguish of an intellectual unable to reconcile the open-ended nature of intellectual debate with the imperatives of constructing social morality.¹⁴ But apart from these contingent constraints, one must also underscore the intellectual networks within which Rammohun's vocabulary was being framed in the late 1810s and 1820s. Despite Rammohun's affiliations with precolonial Indian worlds of disputation, he introduced a new element which had never been deployed so trenchantly in India before, namely the linking of Indian worlds of debate with European Christian networks. This was partially due to the fact that being under attack from his **(p.24)** Indian scholarly opponents, Rammohun found crucial support from Europeans (Zastoupil 2010, 27). Rammohun's commentaries on the Upanishads, in their English language versions as published in the 1810s, began to be praised in the *Periodical Accounts* of the Baptist Missionary Society, in the Church of England's *Missionary Register*, and the author's name was made familiar in Europe by various individual British and French Christians, including the celebrated French revolutionary priest Abbé Grégoire (Carpenter 1866; Collet 1914, 29–33). Missionaries as well as lay Christians helped to popularize his name in Germany as well, leading to the publication of a German translation of his pamphlet *Translation of an Abridgment of the Vedant* (1816) from Jena as early as 1817. Copies of Rammohun's works also began to circulate in North America around this time (Zastoupil 2010, 27–8).

Receiving support from European Christian clerics, missionaries, and reformist laymen in his debates, Rammohun could not but draw upon the conceptual vocabularies carved out by Christian evangelical and other dissident movements in the early nineteenth century. Deist and Unitarian ideological frameworks came in handy in this regard. The use of phraseology such as 'comfort and happiness' attests to this arsenal which Rammohun utilized in order to reconcile Enlightenment-Utilitarian ideas with evangelical or Unitarian concepts. As Lynn Zastoupil notes, Rammohun 'appealed to Protestant readers by casting himself as a crusader against ingrained superstition, idolatry, and priestcraft who suffered social ostracism for attempting to restore the pure religion of the Vedas' (Zastoupil 2010, 28). He considered popular (and in his mind, decadent) Hinduism to be comparable to unreformed Trinitarian Christianity, which, according to him, was a negative product of Roman Catholicism (Roy 1992, 349–50). He further used concepts drawn from European reformist Enlightenment vocabulary such as 'Supreme Being', 'Nature's God', and 'the Author and Governor of the Universe' to describe his notion of divinity (Zastoupil 2010, 28). In the process, it is our contention that Rammohun began to fashion himself as a religious lawgiver and social reformer who would be palatable to an 'enlightened' European public sphere; thereby he metamorphosed from a South Asian debater into a transnational celebrity intellectual. Simultaneously, he came

to increasingly resemble reformist British social moralists. Not **(p.25)** surprisingly, the nineteenth-century Bengali intellectual and civil servant Kishori Chand Mitra described him as a 'religious Benthamite' (Mitra 1845, 388).

In this new reformist public sphere of Bengal, the evangelical Christian overdetermination is visible in the emphasis given on attaining purity from pre-existing corruption. As Rammohun admitted to the Scottish missionary Alexander Duff:

As a youth ... I acquired some knowledge of the English language. Having read about the rise and progress of Christianity in apostolic times, and its corruptions in the succeeding ages, and then of the Christian Reformation which shook off these corruptions and restored it to its primitive purity, I began to think that something similar might have taken place in India, and similar results might follow here from a reformation of the popular idolatry. (Smith 1879, 118)

Given the impact of Christian reformist vocabularies on Rammohun's ideological religious world view, it becomes possible to contextualize his successes in the transcontinental public spheres that stretched from Bengal to Britain, and, touching Germany, extended to North America. Drawing on (late) precolonial forms of public intellectual-religious debate, with their polemical thrust that combined exegesis with responsiveness to social transformation, Rammohun became adept in linking the Bengali world of debate to the Anglo-American worlds. Exegesis, with its stringent intellectual and (in the 'age of atonement', increasingly) self-critical thrust, compounded with an ethical slant, naturally became the first dominant mode in which Rammohun, the colonized subject, made his presence felt in the early nineteenth-century global spheres of argumentation. British intellectuals such as the Utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham found in Rammohun a congenial Indian ally. In fact, Bentham proposed Rammohun's name for being elected as a MP, though the project did not materialize, and was complicated by the question of Rammohun's religious identity: becoming a parliamentarian was still legally impossible for non-Christians. Nevertheless, Rammohun's close involvement with reformist parliamentary politics demonstrates the extent to which the public sphere in early nineteenth-century Britain was rapidly becoming acutely self-conscious of its cosmopolitan goals (Zastoupil 2010, 151–62).

(p.26) It was also at this stage that Rammohun came into personal proximity with Wilberforce. According to one source, Wilberforce was told that when 'he [that is, Rammohun] left the East, one of his chief wishes was to see Mr. Wilberforce' (Wilberforce and Wilberforce 1838, 345). Other contemporaneous accounts attest to Rammohun passing a week in England with Wilberforce (Zastoupil 2010, 4), when he apparently informed the British missionary

reformer that meeting him was more valuable to Rammohun than 'an introduction to all the Monarchs in Europe' (Zastoupil 2010, 147).

Yet there were complexities: Rammohun's entry into the early nineteenth-century public spheres was not a smooth process, but rather bristled with tensions. This is evident from his controversial debates with Christian missionaries in Bengal as well as in Britain, a fact which complicates—chronologically and otherwise—his bridge-building efforts with British reformers. Fundamentally at stake was Rammohun's presumed 'right' to interpret Christianity in his own manner. In the early nineteenth century, it was considerably novel, if not quite unprecedented, for non-Christians to assert such a claim. When Rammohun started authoring his own interpretations,¹⁵ British Christian missionaries in Bengal, and particularly the Baptists, felt that Rammohun had crossed the limits of propriety. In the process, Rammohun also got embroiled in a famously vicious controversy with Robert Tytler, an EIC surgeon. What is interesting to observe, and what has largely gone unnoticed until now, are the transcultural lineages of Rammohun's debating standpoint, as is evident from the *Brahmana Sevadhi* and the *Padri o Shishya Samvada* (1823), which were stylistically comparable to the Bengali and Sanskrit debates with Indian opponents, discussed previously.

In these English and Bengali treatises, Rammohun's basic position was to de-provincialize Christian theology, a move which was **(p.27)** both congruent and in contestation with evangelical (and more broadly British missionary) attempts to universalize the geographical spread of Christianity. Rammohun argued that the moral tenets of Christianity, such as the belief in one benevolent God, could also be found in other religions, while the supposedly baser forms of popular Christianity, such as the belief in rituals and in divine incarnation, were similarly shared with lower forms of other religions. Moral and political reform was, therefore, to be based not on the presumed superiority of European Christians to Hindu and Muslim Indians, but on a trans-religious scheme based on the oneness of God that was shared alike by elite forms of all religions, and could therefore potentially unite Indians and Europeans in a common conversation; for state power to become allied with the presumed superiority of Christianity would be to go against this trajectory of reform. As Rammohun argued in *The Brahmunical Magazine*,¹⁶

In Bengal, where the English are the sole rulers, and where the mere name of Englishman is sufficient to frighten people, an encroachment upon the rights of her poor timid and humble inhabitants and upon their religion, cannot be viewed in the eyes of God or the public as a justifiable act. For wise and good men always feel disinclined to hurt those that are of much less strength than themselves, and if such weak creatures be dependent on

them and subject to their authority, they can never attempt, even in thought, to mortify their feelings. (Roy 1901a, 204)

This passage needs to be contextualized within Rammohun's broader agenda of securing civil and political rights for Indians, issues which sometimes brought him into conflict with the colonial state's mechanisms of controlling ideological information, as seen, for instance, in the debate on the freedom of the press in India, to which we had alluded earlier.

Rammohun found allies among dissident religious groups who were aiming to dismantle the confessional state in Britain itself. The **(p.28)** most prominent of these groups were the Unitarians, who rejected the divinity of Christ and thus found themselves outside the cultural and legal pale of the Christian state in the United Kingdom. The disabilities, legal and social, that they continued to face in the early nineteenth century made them natural supporters for civil rights' campaigns and movements for freedom of conscience. In the emerging public sphere in Britain on the brink of its transition to modernity, the Unitarians played an important role in radicalizing politics. Among other things, they also supported the emancipation of non-Protestant groups such as the Jews and the Catholics, and for pragmatic reasons often hobnobbed with Whig politicians. During the 1820s, Rammohun's cause was thus rapidly taken up by the Unitarians in Bengal. Rammohun's critique against Christian dogmas of incarnation partnered with Unitarian beliefs, and both were caught up in a common trajectory of transnational public sphere radicalism that extended eventually to Britain.¹⁷ Through his Unitarian friends, Rammohun was introduced to Lord Chancellor Brougham and to Jeremy Bentham. Rammohun's Unitarian, Whig, and other radical friends soon brought him into contact with members of the British royal family and members of the aristocracy as well. Whereas British radicals provided crucial support to Rammohun in his campaign to uphold the abolition of suttee, this transcultural nexus, even more significantly, provided an early—if yet unrealized—fillip to make the British state a more multireligious and multiracial liberal enterprise in which a non-European like Rammohun could exercise a political role (Zastoupil 2010). Yet Rammohun continued to maintain his old heteroglossia and sense of multiple loyalties. His identity remained indeterminate; to divergent audiences, he could appeal either as a Hindu, a Persianate member of the Islamic literati, or as a dissident Christian.

Rammohun pioneered a trajectory which was to be followed subsequently by other South Asian intellectuals visiting Europe and/or North America—such as Keshub Chunder Sen, P.C. Mozoomdar, Swami Vivekananda, Anagarika Dharmapala, Rabindranath Tagore, and Mahatma Gandhi—who would all appeal in their own **(p.29)** idiosyncratic manner to transnational ethical-religious debate as a critical way of challenging colonial heteronomy, of negotiating and contesting the universalizing claims of Anglo-European imperial culture, and of

endowing the emerging public spheres of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with a liberal and inclusionary moralizing slant.

To conclude, we considered it necessary to return to the precolonial or 'early modern' traits in Rammohun, since they would help to illumine the reformer's success in exegesis and public debate in colonial Bengal and in Britain, as these two spaces were visibly linked in a common conjuncture. As already underscored, the notion of conjuncture or nexus is particularly significant, also given that, in recent years, scholars have increasingly spoken of (early) modernity as 'historically a global and *conjunctural* phenomenon' (Subrahmanyam 1998, 99), rather than as the exclusive outcome of Western European developments. Critics of this viewpoint have either associated modern traits with European social transformations or they have called for a more critical interrogation of the category of 'modern' itself. Dipesh Chakrabarty, in a recent essay, combines both these critiques: provocatively, he suggests that early modernist scholars on India have narrowly focused on material transformations such as global trade and state formation, but not on the question as to whether precolonial Indian categories of thought still have any use for us. 'Turning specifically to the question of whether or not "early modern" was an apt way of periodizing history in the Indian subcontinent, my question would be: Which Indian or South Asian thinkers from the precolonial period, then, must we still wrestle with in fabricating or thinking about democratic forms of public life?' (Chakrabarty 2011, 674). In the present chapter, our intention has been to respond to this unanswered question. Rammohun Roy—positioned as he was at the cusp between the ideological perspectives of the precolonial and the colonial era—offers us an appropriate space for questioning the relation between pre-nineteenth-century intellectual resources and modernity. Yet Rammohun himself must also be understood in relation to the world of William Wilberforce, which, too, stood at the cusp between an early modern trajectory of Protestant **(p.30)** religious fervour and an imperial modern location of Britishness and its civilizing mission.

Through our readings of Wilberforce and Rammohun, on the one hand, we have tried to complicate the constructed categories of 'modernity' and 'religion' by looking at religious world views within which the emerging public spheres of early nineteenth-century Britain and India were embedded. On the other hand, we have also emphasized the transcontinental nature of the formation of interconnected public spheres. We have identified certain stylistic genres such as *vichara*, *samvada*, *akhbar*, and scriptural exegesis, and certain rhetorical modes such as polemical declamation, self-criticism, *vyanga*, *vidrupa*, and irony, which helped to form a dialogic space that interlinked India and Britain in the early nineteenth century, especially through the medium of religious debate. The interactions between these genres—and their languages of affect and intellect—have received little attention until now, since scholars of colonial India have concentrated on the content of religious discourses to the exclusion of the

formats of disputation. While the path of direct intervention in parliamentary politics was available for Wilberforce but not initially for Rammohun, the latter was able to combine precolonial modes of 'religious' disputation with Western forms of association and print-based communication, and this, in turn, enabled him to subsequently make an impact on British parliamentary agitational arenas as well. By doing so, Rammohun prefigured the modalities to be later deployed by other individuals and groups among the colonized, in staking claims to the democratization of power. In an immanent way, such a historical description as provided earlier can sensitize us to extending the horizons of public action, whether in dealing with the repercussions of the nexus between religion and modern politics, or in learning from the models of disputation with the help of which South Asians, and other similarly positioned groups, built the contours of political society and thereby eventually aided in the construction of 'democratic forms of public life' (Chakrabarty 2011, 674).

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Notes:

(¹) Andrews Norton (1786–1853), also known as the 'the Unitarian Pope', was a leader of mainstream American Unitarianism in the early and mid-nineteenth century.

(²) In accordance with conventional Bengali usage, the first name is used here to identify Rammohun Roy.

(³) The utilitarian doctrine aimed at maximizing overall happiness, a goal which was reinforced at the beginning of the nineteenth century by the cherished ambition to extricate humans from slavery, and pagans from the darkness of non-Christian life, which cemented the marriage of this reductionist ethical approach with missionary zeal. On the convergences between Enlightenment and evangelical ideas in early nineteenth-century Britain regarding the abolition of the slave trade, cf. Page (2011); on the intertwined nature of Utilitarian and evangelical threads in British imperialism in nineteenth-century India, cf. Stokes (1982) and Viswanathan (1989).

(⁴) The mutiny of 1806 in Vellore in the Madras Presidency, by Hindu and Muslim sepoys of the British Indian army, is generally considered to be the first major anti-colonial sepoy revolt in India. As in the more famous 1857 uprising,

perceptions of religious-cultural humiliation and the threat of Christianization constituted important instigating factors behind the 1806 revolt, along with economic-social grievances. See Hoover (2007).

⁽⁵⁾ The texts of both speeches are printed in Hansard (1813, col. 831–72, and 1051–79).

⁽⁶⁾ The colonial British spelling is used here to refer to the practice as understood from colonial paradigms; the Sanskritic spelling, which possesses a broader range of meanings, is *sati*.

⁽⁷⁾ Surprisingly enough, the persuasive force of Wilberforce's rhetorical oratory had to be supplemented by procrastination tactics: thanks to lengthy debates, the crucial vote in the House of Commons on the so-called pious clause did not take place until 3 a.m., by which time most opponents of the measure had left. As a result, the motion was passed by a small representation of parliamentarians, namely by 89 against 36 on 22 June, and 54 against 32 on 1 July (Hansard 1813, 873 and 1082).

⁽⁸⁾ Cf., for instance, the Serampore missionary Joshua Marshman's publication later in 1813 entitled *Advantages of Christianity in Promoting the Establishment and Prosperity of the British Government in India*, in which he contended 'that one of the most effectual means of perpetuating the British dominion in India' would be 'the calm and silent, but steady and constant, diffusion of Christian light among the natives' (Marshman 1813, 6).

⁽⁹⁾ Rammohun's public criticism of suttee dates from the late 1810s, and got entangled with British missionary and reformist discourses, something which has been analysed extensively in academic discourse. But scholars have also pointed out that Rammohun's method of scriptural exegesis simultaneously shows continuities with Sanskritic structures of de-legitimizing suttee; the key link here is the Bengali Brahmin and chief pandit of the Sadar Nizamat Adalat, Mrityunjay Vidyalkar, and his *vyavastha* of 1817 on the inferiority of suttee to ascetic widowhood (Killingley 1993, 4, 34; Mani 1998, 23, 37–8). There ensued a complex entanglement of pre-Western, European Orientalist, Christian missionary, and reformist-humanitarian discourses, providing a climate of opinion for the abolition of the practice.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Important instances of these treatises include: *Utsavananda Vidyavagishar Sahita Vichara* (Debate with Utsavananda Vidyavagisha, a Vaishnava scholar, 1816); *Bhattacharyer Sahita Vichara* (Debate with Bhattacharya, the famous Bengali Brahmin scholar Mrityunjaya Vidyalkara, 1817); *Gosvami Sahita Vichara* (Debate with Gosvami, a Vaishnava scholar identified now as Ramagopala Sharma, 1818); *Sahamarana Vishaya Pravartaka o Nivartaker Samvada* (Dialogue between Proponent and Opponent regarding suttee, 1818, an imaginary dialogue written to refute the views of supporters of suttee);

Sahamarana Vishaye Pravartaka o Nivartaker Dvitiya Samvada (Second dialogue between Proponent and Opponent, written to refute the scholar Kashinatha Tarkavagisha's treatise *Vidhayaka Nishedhaka Samvada*, 1819); *Kavitakarer Sahita Vichara* (Debate with the maker of poems, who has not been identified as yet, 1820); *Subrahmanya Shastrir Sahita Vichara* (Debate with Subrahmanya Shastri, another Brahmin scholar, 1820); *Chari Prashner Uttara* (Reply to four questions, posed by Kashinatha Tarkapanchanana, another scholar, 1822); *Pathya Pradana* (Giving of medicine, a reply to the treatise *Pashandapirana* of Kashinatha Tarkapanchanana, 1823); *Kayasthar Sahita Madyapanavishayaka Vichara* (Debate with a Kayastha on the issue of drinking alcohol, 1826); and *Sahamarana Vishaya* (About suttee, that is, an imaginary vichara with two individuals, 1829). Bruce Robertson, going against the traditional consensus, has argued that some of these treatises were not directly authored by Rammohun, but by people associated with Rammohun's milieu (Robertson 1995). Even if this view is valid, it does not alter our basic hypothesis about the argumentative structure of Rammohun and his circle as arising from precolonial South Asian frameworks.

(¹¹) Cf. the gradual formation of *Utsavananda Vidyavagisher Sahita Vichara*, as recorded by the debaters, in Roy (1973, 85, 88, 97, 102), and the formation of *Gosvami Sahita Vichara*, Roy (1973, 155).

(¹²) Interestingly, even today, the common Bengali word for news is *samvada*, or *khabar*, and for newspaper is *samvadapatra*, while the common Hindi word for news is *akhbar*.

(¹³) On Rammohun's discomfort with Indian uses of *upahasa*, *vyanga*, *vidrupa*, and satire, see, for instance, *Bhattacharyer Sahita Vichara* and *Kavitakarer Sahita Vichara* (Roy 1973, 108, 212); and *A Second Defence of the Monotheistical System of the Veds, in Reply to an Apology for the Present State of Hindoo Worship* (Roy 1901a, 147–8).

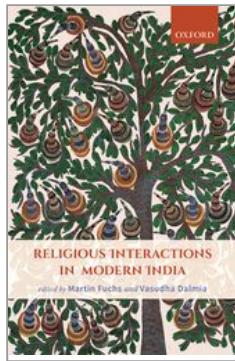
(¹⁴) On the intellectual contours of this transition from radical scepticism to an absolutist belief in social morality and godhood, cf. Banerjee (2009a, 48–56).

(¹⁵) The main treatises (Roy 1901a; 1901b; 1973; 1992) authored by Rammohun to defend his particular exegetical viewpoints were: *The Precepts of Jesus the Guide to Peace and Happiness* (1820); *An Appeal to the Christian Public in Defence of 'The Precepts of Jesus'* (1820); *Second Appeal to the Christian Public in Defence of 'The Precepts of Jesus'* (1821); *The Brahmical Magazine or the Missionary and the Brahmun*, and its Bengali version *Brahmana Sevadhi* (1821–3); and *Final Appeal to the Christian Public in Defence of 'The Precepts of Jesus'* (1823).

(¹⁶) The *Brahmunicipal Magazine* is traditionally, and almost universally, considered as having been authored by Rammohun. Bruce Robertson (Robertson 1995, 38–9) has questioned this assumption. Lynn Zastoupil (Zastoupil 2010, 134, 217–18) largely defends the traditional view, and argues that the passages on Christianity were at any rate written by Rammohun.

(¹⁷) This also explains why Rammohun ideologically diverged from Wilberforce, the latter criticizing Unitarianism for harbouring different kinds of heresy (Zastoupil 2010, 14).

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On the Cusp of Colonial Modernity

Administration, Women, and Islam in Princely Bhopal

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Abstract and Keywords

The chapter discusses the exceptional case of the mid-19th-century Muslim woman ruler Sikandar Begum in the princely state of Bhopal in central India, whose mother had also been the regent of Bhopal state and whose daughter followed her as ruler. The author depicts this as transition from an earlier local form of Islamic statecraft that did not shy away from the use of force and relied on a decentralized structure, to a new mode of more centralized administration following the British model. Instead of engaging in Sufism or in reformist Islam, Sikandar Begum personally practised what the author calls a protestant-style Islam, without, however, attempting to curb other denominational observances. There was no idea yet of a distinct 'Muslim world', rather a fusion of traditional and what was considered modern (administrative) practices from the top down, appropriating Mughal paraphernalia, without raising the issue of religious identity in any emphatic sense.

Keywords: Sikandar Begum, Bhopal, regent, Islamic statecraft, decentralized structure, Sufism, reformist Islam, religious identity

Rule in such a way that sovereignty (sultanat) be obedient to the shar'ia and do not trust instead to the shari'at of sovereignty

To conquer countries is not bravery but to rule them is. The wise conquer a country and take control of it. The ignorant destroy it.

Wherever a king settles, he should be vigilant because the usher and the gate keeper do not always let the troubles of the subjects reach his ears

Always fear a weak enemy because in desperation he'll gamble his life. A cat may be weak, but facing a lion, she'll claw out its eyes.

Make friends with high and low, and plant love in their hearts

Act in such a way that after your death people speak well of you, not in such a way that they praise you to your face out of fear.

In your lifetime try to excel all others in deeds, humanity, and generosity because in death the king and the faqir are one.

Nawab Sikandar Begum, *A'in-i Sikandari*

(Sikandar, Begum of Bhopal, n.d. 3, 19–21)

(p.35) The Prelude

Sikandar Begum's birth in 1819 coincided roughly with the establishment of British sovereignty in central India. As ruler of the princely state of Bhopal from 1844 (effectively) until her death in 1868, her ascendancy overlapped British efforts to create a more centralized polity in India and, in 1858, the replacement of East India Company (EIC) rule by that of the Crown.

Sikandar's early years witnessed substantial violence. Sikandar's mother, known as Qudsiyya ('the holy') Begum, was the daughter of the nominal nawab, whose power by the turn of the nineteenth century had been usurped by a rival lineage. Qudsiyya's marriage in 1816 to Nazar Muhammad Khan, a scion of that 'junior lineage', was meant to dampen rivalry between the two lines. It was Nazar Muhammad who in 1818 negotiated an agreement to accept the EIC's overlordship in return for a guarantee of the state's borders; the Company also guaranteed succession to the nawabship for his lineal descendants. The issue of succession arose far sooner than anyone would have expected when in 1819 Qudsiyya's eight-year-old brother shot the young ruler dead, an event that was in everyone's interests to treat as an accident.

Qudsiyya Begum, in a remarkable move, was able to gain British support for herself as regent for her infant daughter, Sikandar Begum, with the agreement that the nawabship would pass back to her husband's line upon Sikandar's

marriage to a member of his family. Female regency was wholly unknown among these Afghans, common as it was, for example, among the Marathas and Rajputs of the region. Real change in that sense came with the British presence, but what was at stake was very old, namely the competition among cousins, close and distant, for power. For almost two decades, Qudsiyya Begum effectively restored the power of the senior line, gathering her own ministers and advisors around her. Although she had acquired a novel role as maternal regent, much of her exercise of power harked back to an earlier era, both regarding her own charismatic style and regarding the place of violence in securing dominance, starting with the death of her husband.

Qudsiyya Begum was expert in managing power. She schemed and plotted in every way conceivable to forestall her daughter's inevitable marriage—of which convincing the court and the British that **(p.36)** the designated groom (the elder of her late husband's nephews) was impotent was only her most notable ploy. Marriage to the younger brother, Jahangir Muhammad Khan, was finally concluded in 1835 only with pressure exerted by Lord Bentinck, the governor-general, himself. The marriage itself gave the first clues that the bride herself had emerged with a view to her own interests and power. Sikandar Begum required from Jahangir an agreement effectively preserving power to herself as well as requiring his monogamy and her right to operate without seclusion. Jahangir soon showed that he had no intention of honouring this agreement. Meanwhile, Qudsiyya continued to take charge for herself and her daughter, delaying the handover of power to Jahangir until outright war broke out and hundreds died. This was an old-time Bhopal power struggle with a vengeance. The conflict was only settled when British military forces intervened, and a diplomatic settlement was arranged for Qudsiyya to essentially be bought off with the grant of rights to the revenue from lands of considerable wealth and size.

Jahangir's reign (1837–44) did not go well. Colonial officials anxiously watched his strained relationship with his wife, Sikandar Begum, who, for her part, along with her mother, went about in public in ways unconventional for elite women, whether Rajput or Maratha or Pathan. Jahangir appears to have tried to kill her off at least twice, the first time along with her mother. Sikandar Begum's first recorded words are an Urdu deposition to the British political agent describing the scandalous second attempt to assassinate her, set in a bedroom, in 1837. Far from the voice of a would-be ruler, she presented herself as nothing other than a dutiful and devout wife; Jahangir, in contrast, came across as impious and self-indulgent:

It was evening and the nawwab came to me. At that time, I was reading my *namaz* and right during my *namaz*, he started in with some jocularly. After *namaz*, I said to him, 'Nawwab Sahib, such jocularly during *namaz* is surely a sin.' He said he wanted me to massage his head with perfume. So

he put his sword in the outer courtyard, went inside ... and I followed and applied the perfume to his head.¹

(p.37) Sikandar Begum went on to describe Jahangir's drunken recovery of the sword and his attempt to assassinate her. She escaped and departed with her mother and key courtiers to the old eighteenth-century palace fort in Islamnagar, 11 kilometres distant from Bhopal.²

Jahangir did not live long. He was only twenty-seven at the time of his death in 1844. His debility at such a young age was thought to be some ill-defined dropsy or cirrhosis, product of his dissolute living. At the time of his final illness, Sikandar was still with her dispossessed mother and a little daughter, Shah Jahan Begum, who had been born after her arrival in Islamnagar. Hearing the news of Jahangir's imminent demise, Sikandar Begum hastened with the six-year-old child to Bhopal, whether as an ever-forgiving wife to bid her husband farewell, as the family histories in their streamlined accounts claim, or to assume a role in what was likely to be a contest over power. The contest began within the junior line. Jahangir's father, the roué discredited since the time of his younger brother Nazar's succession to power in 1816, claimed his right to the throne. Jahangir's prime minister (who was also his maternal uncle) announced the succession of Jahangir's son, born to a courtesan, Jahangir's own preference.³ The contest was on.

British officials were not pleased at the thought of continued regency, let alone outright power on the part of a woman. What were the options? Earlier in Bhopal, at least one son not born of a formal marriage had succeeded as nawab, but that possibility ran up against **(p.38)** British abhorrence of sexual liaisons with courtesans and slaves. British officials even before Jahangir's death had been weighing Qudsiyya's two brothers as likely successors—in seeming oblivion of the 1818 agreement. In the end, a variation of the 1819 solution was decided on: Qudsiyya's brother, Fauzdar Muhammad Khan (who as a child had shot dead Nazar Muhammad Khan), was named regent for Shah Jahan Begum, who now was installed as titular nawab until such time as she married someone from her father's family who would then become nawab. Sikandar was assigned the limited role of the child's guardian. Jahangir's father and his prime minister promptly united, rallied their forces, and tried to stage a rebellion. The denouement saw several hundred dead; the father and two of his sons, along with 200 Rohilla forces, imprisoned; and the prime minister exiled to Banaras for ten years. Jahangir's elder brother (the one tainted by the accusation of impotence) died in an epidemic in the same year (Shahjahan, Begum of Bhopal 1876, 57). By 1844, the claims of the junior line seemed to have been neutralized.⁴ Two years later, Sikandar's lackadaisical uncle, with British official approval, yielded the regency to her, and family members rallied in support.

Nawab Sikandar Begum: 'The Best Man of Business among the Native Chiefs'

Sikandar Begum was 27 years old when she emerged as regent. Arguably no one was more surprised than she was, given her mother's continued attempts to control events and her determination to reclaim the regency for herself.

Sikandar seems to have absorbed her indomitable mother's model of resisting anyone else's control. To secure this, she was clearly determined to demonstrate that she could operate to the standards of the colonial regime. To say that her governing style represented the cusp of 'colonial modernity' is primarily meant to call attention to some of her important innovations in rule that were increasingly characteristic in both British and princely India at the **(p.39)** height of the Raj. These included her emulation of colonial administrative practices, her assimilation to certain personal and intellectual styles, and her positioning within the geographic space of India and even beyond. At the same time, however, the expression intends to signal that certain key themes that characterized Indian social and political life by empire's end were not in fact yet in place. Of these, expectations about the proper role for respectable women—focused on domesticity, modesty, and cultural transmission—was one.

Sikandar, arguably, acted in these decades of rule in what one might call a 'unisex' style. In this, she differed from her daughter and granddaughter—rulers though they were too—who later in the century would be shaped by new ideas of women's respectability. As movements of cultural nationalism emerged in the later nineteenth century, they, like many elite women, cultivated styles of dress and deportment clearly marked as women in ways that Sikandar herself did not. The popular Urdu novelist Nazir Ahmad (1831–1912) put Sikandar in a best-selling Urdu novel—along with two Mughal women and Queen Victoria—enjoining his readers to see her as a role model for time management and education in the service of home and family, not, like her, as a participant in public life.⁵

Sikandar came into power with a sense that she was entitled to rule even if she was a woman, more of a believer in the hereditary succession of the British treaty of 1818 than British officials proved to be. And she acted to secure that power. Europeans who interacted with Sikandar Begum during her period in power routinely turned to metaphors of masculinity to describe her. She typically dressed like a man, she rode and she shot, she moved about freely in public, and she had the Persianate education of typical male literati. Was she then—in **(p. 40)** part enabled by the fact that she had neither husband, nor father, nor brother—able to act as what is sometimes called 'a functional male'?

Alternatively, given today's views of egalitarian gender norms, should she instead be seen as precociously 'modern', a conclusion that would describe her behaviour not so much as partaking of 'colonial modernity' but 'modern before

her time'? The answer is that neither gloss does justice to Sikandar's *modus operandi*.

Arguably, the insistence on the metaphor of maleness tells more about the European observers, given their own anxieties over 'the woman question' and over reified ideas of Indian 'custom', than about Sikandar. Sikandar acted as a *ruler*, not as a male. Women in chiefly families who took on military and political roles acted not as men but as rulers, behaving as appropriate to that position. Similarly men, like two of the nawabs in the eighteenth century who withdrew to the inner world of their forts to pursue quiet lives reputedly devoted to prayer, were not taken to be acting like women—who were stereotypically limited to the inner space of dwellings—but rather as playing out the charismatic dimension which was also essential to rulership. Nor should Sikandar be seen as espousing anything like new styles, let alone rights, of women generally. Her concern was with her own effective power. Sikandar's succession itself was a mark of new styles of succession, but her behaviour represented an earlier era of malleable gender roles, even if those roles historically precluded women from acknowledgement as actual chief.⁶

Louis Rousselet, a French travel writer who spent three months in Sikandar's court in the late 1860s, described his first meeting with her:

Rising at our approach, she advanced towards us, and courteously shaking hands with us, invited us to seat ourselves beside her Her thin face, lighted up by a pair of intelligent eyes, expresses such a singular amount of energy that one must be aware of it beforehand **(p.41)** in order to realise the fact that a woman is before you. The costume itself aids the illusion; tight fitting pantaloons, and embroidered jacket, and a poniard at the belt have, as a whole, anything but a feminine appearance. Her gestures and manners still less remind one of her sex; on the contrary, they reveal the sovereign and the autocrat accustomed to find everything yield to his all-powerful will, but I must add at once that this majestic haughtiness lasted for only a few moments and soon gave way to a gracious and winning affability. (Rousselet 1876, 447)⁷

Rousselet pointed out that the formal court dress of long coat, pyjama, and headgear worn askew was shared not only by women at the court but by men as well. A sketch by the artist accompanying him shows Rousselet at the end of his visit, dressed in a costume provided by Sikandar that was virtually identical to hers as he received honours at her hand. Rousselet rode out with Sikandar as she toured the city and countryside; he shared evenings of conversation and entertainment with her in the court.

There is further evidence of Sikandar's dress in her final decade, above all, in a series of about a dozen portraits of her taken by James Waterhouse. In 1862,

Waterhouse, a young army officer and surveyor, arrived in Bhopal on behalf of the government with hopes of persuading the ruler to allow him to take photographs, both of courtiers and the general population, for the upcoming Great London Exposition, photographs that would subsequently be widely circulated in such publications as Watson and Kaye's *The People of India* (1868–75) (see Falconer 2009; Watson and Kaye 1865–78).⁸ Waterhouse had to this point encountered considerable incivility during his tour in central India. But what happened in Bhopal should disabuse anyone of lingering stereotypes they might hold about how a ruler, Muslim and a woman, would look and act. Ever curious and adaptable, Sikandar Begum volunteered to play dress-up. 'The Begum dressed herself, her **(p.42)** daughter, her granddaughter, and Madame Doolan⁹ in all fashions of Native costume in order that I might get photographs of the dress of Native ladies. At Bhopal I was received with more civility than at any other place I visited'¹⁰ Waterhouse's problem of recalcitrant subjects was solved.

In her own portraits, Sikandar's default court dress was in Mughal style, with trousers, coat, and vest. Her inventive headgear ranged from turban, to Bhopali cap, to the European crown-like headgear pioneered by another prince, the Awadhi 'king' (that was by regulation not permitted to fully mimic the British), to feathered headgear in the Nepali style. The fabrics were sumptuous, colourful, and richly worked; one coat included fur epaulets. Sikandar and others of the court took to one European innovation: the wearing of white socks. Sikandar Begum had no hesitation in dressing in ways other than that of a ruler, including dressing as an ordinary woman. She and her daughter donned Maratha women's saris for one photograph, appropriately adding a bindi to the forehead in the style of Hindu women. She posed along with her daughter and Madame Doolan in the marriage dress typical of north and central India. In two pictures Sikandar and her daughter dressed for a masquerade, or 'private entertainment', with both wearing their hair curled and hanging free. Dress and demeanour were a matter of the occasion.

It is hardly surprising that the image that Sikandar presented to the British, however, emphasized the (typically male) role of ruler. In the words of H.M. Durand, the British Resident in Bhopal in the 1850s who clearly relished her company, Sikandar Begum was 'the best man of business' he had ever known among 'the Native chiefs'.¹¹ To be sure, a quotation from another political agent, S.C. Macpherson, writing in the mid-1850s, tags Sikandar as a certain kind of woman, but he also paints an image of the two **(p.43)** of them side-by-side watching the 'nautch'—not a typical image for any respectable elite woman, whether Afghan woman, Maratha, or Rajput—and underlines the centrality to Sikandar of the 'business' of administration, which was her pride:

The Secunder Begum-regent talks exactly, in her way, like the fastest European woman you may happen to know—for example, mixing politics with her personalities. We talked of the King of Lucknow's four hundred peris¹² and of Sleeman,¹³ passing to the theory and practice of revenue-surveying; the great mystery of my not being married, and that of the disposal of Nagpore; the question of my age and that of how the present revenue settlement in Scindiah's country may stand five years hence; the comparative value of Cashmerian and English needlework, and the merits of the English and the Arab military exercises; the terrible nonsense of *darbar* forms and talk, and then (half an hour during the *nautching*) about Ryotwar, Goomsurwar, etc.,¹⁴ as if we had been a Board of Revenue. I happened to say, somewhat emphatically, of those matters, that everything depended on the way any system was worked—on the '*uml*'—that everything, in fact was '*uml*'. And I wished you had seen how she turned to her two ministers, sitting dumb some way off, and cried, 'Gentlemen, do you hear? That's *for you!*' '*Uml* is everything'.¹⁵

Sikandar Begum's high reputation among the rulers was sealed with her role in support of the British in 1857. Lord Canning, at the post-Mutiny Jubblepore *darbar*, told Sikandar: 'When [British power] was beset and threatened ..., you, a woman, guided its affairs with a **(p.44)** courage and ability, and success that would have done honour to any statesman or soldier.'¹⁶

Administration and Succession: 'To Rule on English Principles'

Sikandar Begum's reputation was built on her administrative record. She needed to fend off challengers to her power and, to that end, above all, set a pattern that would win British support. She faced the prospect in the 1840s and 1850s that states like hers, legally in a position of 'subsidiary alliance' to the EIC with an acknowledgement of British 'paramountcy', might well face colonial takeover precisely for the problems that had plagued Bhopal, not least contests over succession as well as the indebtedness that invariably gave rise to charges of corruption and failed rule. Indeed, under Lord Dalhousie as governor-general (1848–56), the fear of absorption into Company rule was ever present. Sikandar Begum held the British at bay. As the political agent wrote, she immediately set out 'to rule on English principles' with the result that (apart, he noted, from her being a woman and therefore of possessing 'impatience of temper') she was 'perhaps the ideal of what we should hope for among Indian princes'. She was 'ambitious of our approbation and ... ever enquiring about our principles and processes'.¹⁷

In the decade before the Mutiny, Sikandar Begum undertook the kind of unification of sovereignty that had been initiated from Calcutta for British India, winning the admiration of a political agent like Macpherson and colonial officialdom generally. In principle, she ended the system of dependence on the contingents of *jagirdars* (the intermediaries granted revenue rights to tracts of

land) in favour of a salaried army.¹⁸ In the same spirit, she created a police force apart **(p.45)** from that of the local overlords, and began a structure of courts, including a court of appeals. Personal law here as everywhere was largely the law of communities, and justice often continued in the hands of local landholders and community elders. Criminal law especially might find its way into the courts.

An episode that took place near the end of Sikandar's rule offers a glimpse of Bhopal's judicial infrastructure and method. While en route to Bhopal, Rousselet had the unhappy experience of a night-time theft of his equipment, souvenirs, and belongings as his party camped near the great Buddhist site of Sanchi. A district magistrate with scribes and police quickly appeared to put the watchmen in irons and pen up the entirety of the local population for interrogation. A judge soon arrived from the capital. Rousselet's artist's sketch records a hierarchy of officials in place, scribes at work (the written word having taken over the place orality once had), and ready recourse to force—here a whip—to produce what was thought to be the truth.¹⁹ The drawing was 'Justice in the Jungle', making clear that the transition to limiting official functions to formal settings had not yet happened. The begum sent word that she would indemnify Rousselet's loss.

Sikandar Begum undertook a land survey of the state and marked out the state's frontiers. She divided Bhopal into three districts and appointed a hierarchy of officials at district and more local levels. She herself toured her territory on horseback. She began projects of building roads, inns, and dispensaries offering medical treatment in the Greco-Arabic humoral tradition. Her father had made his own uncle his chief minister; she, by contrast, not only depended on the Bourbons but also increasingly on officials and others drawn from the courts of north India, made the easier after the 1857 uprising when the celebrated courtly centres of Delhi and Lucknow were no more. This provided core support insulated from local factions.

Sikandar also set out to guarantee lineal succession, not a feature of the agreement with the EIC, though always the British preference. **(p.46)** She was specifically determined to secure the hitherto unheard of right for a woman to claim the throne despite the commitment made in 1844 that her daughter's husband, as her own had done, would become nawab. She conducted this campaign indirectly, and relentlessly, consulting all the 'stake-holders' at every step in a veritable business-school model of effective leadership. First, she secured the agreement that she alone would name Shah Jahan Begum's spouse. Next, she surveyed all possible family males and secured concurrence that none was suitable. Then, she gathered in Bhopal a range of young men from throughout north India, even a scion of the Mughals, to train and observe as potential husbands, and, yet again, she concluded that none had the necessary

skill and moral fibre. None had, in short, the qualifications of Shah Jahan Begum, trained up, after all, by none other than herself.

In the end, Sikandar informed the British and the court that the suitable husband for Shah Jahan Begum was close at hand: Baqi Muhammad Khan, son of the court's legendary military hero and her own right-hand man. In fact what was most important from her perspective was that Baqi lacked the proper family pedigree to claim the throne himself, and, as her own trusted advisor, could be counted on to raise no challenge. Shah Jahan Begum, Sikandar argued, should ascend on her own death to be the first woman to rule in her own right. That Baqi was twice Shah Jahan's age, twice married (with a living wife and children), and of wholly different temperament and interests, all paled in comparison to the obvious political advantages of the match. After seeking instructions from London, the governor-general agreed to all conditions except the continuation of Sikandar's regency beyond Shah Jahan's coming of age. In 1855, the wedding took place with great ceremony, and Baqi, now to be known as Umrao Doulah and honoured with gun salute and jagir, palanquin, and elephant, could look forward to a life as nawab consort. The example of Prince Albert was invoked.²⁰ Marriage, as in the case of mother and grandmother before, was **(p.47)** meant to resolve political problems, although in this case by marginalizing, not empowering, the spouse.

The triumph of the marriage behind her, the Mutiny occurred in the nick of time to avoid Sikandar's handing over of power to her daughter. Like every other secure 'native' ruler in India, Sikandar proved herself loyal, but her loyalty went well beyond neutrality or gesture. She banned seditious pamphlets, improved conditions for her army to keep them happy, and removed mutinous rebels. Sepoys rebelled in the British garrison towns of Sehore and Berasia, with their leadership in part taken up by disgruntled jagirdars and their rebellion endorsed as jihad by some Islamic scholars. Even Qudsiyya Begum initially sympathized with the rebel cause.²¹ Baqi Muhammad Khan was recalled to his earlier military role and became the crucial figure rallying the loyalty of the Bhopal troops and deploying them effectively. Bhopal was made a haven for British civilians, including the Indore-based Resident along with other officials and women and children. Sikandar was acclaimed as the company's firmest friend in a time of crisis.

And, as a heroine in colonial eyes, she could now show the logical fallacy of according the right of succession to Shah Jahan Begum while denying it to herself. In 1859, Shah Jahan would be 21 and entitled to succeed to power. Sikandar used the coincidence of the transfer to Crown rule as the occasion to protest a history of violations of her rights guaranteed (in the words of the English version) 'in the executed treaty with this state'.

Your Honour is well aware that in former times it has been the custom of this State that on the death of the Chief his son should be appointed in his stead, and in accordance with this custom, I, on the death of my father, was made Ruler. This was in accordance with the treaty. When I grew up ..., the Nawab Jahangir Muhammad Khan, because of his being my husband, was made Ruler of this State, which was my inheritance. This was done in contravention of the treaty²²

(p.48) The voice of Sikandar in 1859 was no longer the voice of the dutiful and subordinate wife of 1838. It was the voice of a 'chief' with rights to rule, of a subject deploying the ruler's own arguments to insist on justice. The document is also, of course, a testimony to the power of words to assert reality: direct female succession had never been the practice. But the word in the original Persian treaty, *farzand*, is ambiguous in regard to gender and can be translated as 'offspring,' not 'son' as in the official English translation. More to the point, once the decision was made in 1855 to recognize that Shah Jahan could rule in her own right, Sikandar's claim was clearly irrefutable, and no argument carried more sway with the British in matters like these than what was claimed as 'immemorial' custom.

The British agreed on the last day of 1859. The political agent and agent to the governor-general arrived in state from Sehore and Indore respectively to enthrone Sikandar Begum and demote her daughter to the status of heir apparent. Sikandar Begum duly received pearls and jewelled bracelets, shawls including one from Burhanpur, brocade, muslins, a silver inkstand, a sword and shield, four English cannons, two be-trapped horses, and one elephant complete with silver howdah and golden embroidered housings. She tendered in return 227 gold coins as a ceremonial offering to the viceroy, and the ceremony was complete (Shahjahan, Begum of Bhopal 1876, 71-2). With streamlined succession, however anomalous its gendered component, along with model administration, Bhopal fit the themes of order and administrative rationality that 'colonial modernity' entailed.

A 'Mahomedan State': 'Neither Bigoted in Religion nor in the Practice of Government, or in Social Customs'²³

What did the religious identity of the ruler entail? In the British taxonomy, states were characterized by the religion of the ruler, one of many ways of marking them as 'medieval'. Bhopal was not an 'Islamic state' in terms of its institutions and policies; the 'Islamist' goal of transforming all institutions into what are taken to be distinctive **(p.49)** Islamic patterns appears only later in the twentieth century in South Asia and elsewhere. Sikandar Begum's policies were not geared to 'Islamization' in that sense. There is a second potential meaning of a religious identity that is current in the colonial period, namely as a census category. In this regard, if one asks whether Sikandar Begum identified herself as an 'Indian Muslim', a category that took on particular meaning with later

political inclusion in ruling structures, the answer there too is 'no'. Nor did the concept of 'the Muslim world' have meaning for her. Both of these categories of identity would be enduring components of the 'colonial modernity' that emerged later in the century.

As for her own Islamic practice, in contrast to her predecessors, Sikandar personally practised, and to some extent patronized, an Islamic orientation that tended less towards Sufism and more towards what can loosely be called a Protestant-style Islam, focused on Islamic practices and institutions—including in her case going on hajj—that had not earlier been current. She may even have questioned some excessive practices at the famous Sufi shrines in the style of Islamic reform (Shahjahan, Begum of Bhopal 1876, 95). The emerging reformist trend in religious style, however, does not seem to have extended to public life. In Bhopal, celebration of Muhurram in a style offensive to many reformers flourished. Sikandar herself did not veil. Her orientation towards the reformist Islam of the colonial era was at most incipient.

Sikandar's religious policy and rule generally, one might argue, did not replace but rather fit into the normative framework her formative Persianate education had provided. Qudsiyya Begum was illiterate. But in one of her shrewdest moves, she saw to it that her daughter and only child had an education that was in every way the equal of that of the male literati. A fruit of that was Sikandar's own authorship of a short compendium of guidelines for good governance, the source of the extract given earlier. The *A'in-i Sikandari: ya'ni Zawabt o Adab-i Hukumat* (Sikandar's Laws or the Rules of Governance) demonstrated Sikandar's familiarity with the Persian texts fundamental to the education of the Mughal court, namely the *Gulistan*, the *Akhlaq Jalali*, and the *Akhlaq Nasiri*. The content of her text in fact generally followed the non-sectarian moral guidelines, which Muzaffar Alam has argued characterized Mughal royal conduct (Alam 2004). **(p.50)** As the epithet suggests, the text offered multiple proverbs and words of advice to encourage a ruler toward prudence, strategic relationships, hard work, and cultivation of a good reputation. Her education contributed to Sikandar's considerable self-confidence, and it also fostered the pragmatic and open approach to new administrative expectations she demonstrated.

As far as religion goes, one might even go so far as to say that the begums, like princely rulers generally, treated their own traditions as a sort of 'established religion'.²⁴ Sikandar presented herself as a moral ruler and a conscientious observer of Islamic practices. She directed state and personal patronage to Islamic sites and scholars. She simultaneously accommodated and, in a more modest way, supported the institutions of non-Muslims as well. Her most loyal courtiers included Hindus and Christians, even as a Muslim and Afghan connection allowed her to form specific family and other networks. As we have seen, her *A'in* enjoined patronage to specialists in Islamic knowledge and holiness, the building of mosques, and so on. This was legitimate rule by a

Muslim monarch and, in that sense, her form of governance could be called 'Muslim' or even 'Islamic' rule. To carry out this rule, however, she operated according to norms that *ceteris paribus* were widely shared in this era across religious traditions. One must not be misled by such references as the injunction to rule by shari'at in the epigraph above since the term in many settings in this era had come to be used as equivalent to such abstractions as 'justice'.²⁵

(p.51) From Badshah Shah Jahan to Nawwab Shah Jahan: Bhopal as Part of India

A final dimension of Sikandar Begum's embrace of new styles of governance was the move to make Bhopal a component of 'India', one that followed on the new political arena created under colonial rule. Bhopal's early rulers had focused on a regional area, and, under the British, were not permitted to engage in independent political relationships with other states. Yet, ironically, it was sets of princes in the post-Mutiny period who most clearly, albeit informally, emerged as an interacting India-wide class, brought together regularly for darbars and other ceremonies. The choice of Mughal symbols for Bhopal was not obvious. Bhopal had never been a Mughal province. The Afghans were often opposed to the Mughals. The Bhopal regime in 1857 sided with the British against the last scion of that dynasty. But now the Bhopal rulers' laid claim to the aura and heritage of Mughal symbols.

For rough and ready Afghans, like the Rajputs at the height of Mughal rule, to be Mughal was to be identified as imperial. A Rajput palace or temple built in the provinces in the Mughal style at the height of the empire was a claim on power and prestige. The Bhopalis now moved in the same direction, with nothing more striking than the names chosen for Nawab Jahangir and Shah Jahan Begum, those of the fourth and fifth of the great Mughals. Nazar Muhammad Khan, signatory to the agreement of 1818 with the company, had a typical Pathan name, whose pattern was that of the name of the Prophet Muhammad, preceded by a word depicting some Sufi-like relationship to him; elite women, such as Gauhar Ara, had had names linked to beauty or adornments (and as an adult, in her case, to holiness as 'Qudsiyya'). This pattern was broken when Gauhar Ara/Qudsiyya Begum's and Nazar Muhammad's child was named 'Sikandar' in evocation of Alexander the Great, not a Mughal to be sure, but a hero in the Persianate tradition.

During the period of Sikandar Begum's rule, public architecture also took a turn to what could be called a 'Mughal revival' style (on the pattern of American 'Spanish revival' architecture in roughly the same period). It was 'revival' because it did not represent simple continuity but an attempt to recover the earlier imperial style at its height. **(p.52)** Its first important example was Bhopal's 'Moti Masjid', completed at the end of Sikandar Begum's reign. The very name was resonant with Mughal precedents and the structure was deliberately modelled on Emperor Shah Jahan's great mid-seventeenth-century

congregational mosque built as part of his new city, Shahjahanabad (in today's Old Delhi). The mosque was nearing completion when Rousselet visited in 1868 at the end of Sikandar's life, and he concluded that '(i)t would be considered a grand monument for any period in any country'.²⁶ Sikandar's grave, framed in marble walls and open to the sky, echoed Aurangzeb's own. Sikandar's daughter in due course would build her own 'Shahjahanabad'. It housed a palace named the 'Taj Mahal' and a second far grander mosque also modelled on Emperor Shah Jahan's. For Sikandar, names, architecture, dress, her *A'in*—all evoked imperial Mughal rule. When Waterhouse came to the court, he commented that there was nothing distinctive in dress or appearance that distinguished Bhopal courtiers as Pathan.

To aspire to being Mughal in the nineteenth century, however, did not have the same meaning as it did at the height of Mughal rule. Mughal symbols continued to convey power and cultivated taste. But they also were increasingly marked as 'Muslim'. When Rousselet saw the city in 1863, he saw it as a 'Musulman' city:

We issued upon a fine plateau, distinguishing at the same time on the horizon the picturesque outlines of Bhopal. The city spreads itself in the form of an amphitheatre, on the declivity of a hill, the foot of which is bathed by a fine lake surrounded by a circle of large trees. Looking down upon the red-roofed houses and groups of palace terraces, two gigantic minarets shoot proudly upward, like two arms raised towards heaven; and here and there bulb-shaped domes may be seen rising, surmounted by the golden crescent which characterizes the mosques; but no pagoda's spire, no pagan temple, pollutes the proud Mussulman city, one of the last bulwarks of Islam in Hindostan. (Rousselet 1876, 446)²⁷

(p.53) In the new colonialist and nationalist histories of the day, the Mughals were increasingly seen as foreign despoilers. What for the Rajputs had been an imperial style, including an architectural style used for temples, was obscured in favour of a new image of Rajputs, who now were imagined as 'Indian', defending a Hindu world against a Muslim 'invader' (Asher 1996, 215–38). Rousselet's comments suggest this emerging vision.

As already evident, Sikandar Begum's court was a hospitable and welcoming place, and she interacted extensively with people who could give her a sense of the larger world. The British residents and agents were frequent visitors, and their wives were among the many English women whom Sikandar befriended. As noted earlier, Sikandar's hiring and patronage practices also tied her to more expansive geographic networks while simultaneously giving her an independent base. Especially after 1858, Sikandar found a buyer's market for the recruitment of staff, court poets, and others as many courts declined or disappeared.²⁸ One of Sikandar's most far-sighted and important decisions was to shift the official language of the court from Persian to Urdu in 1862, thus aligning Bhopal with

the same transition in pre-Mutiny British India. In this she preceded Hyderabad by roughly two decades.

And Sikandar took every opportunity to travel. In 1866, at a darbar in Agra, she pointed out in conversation with the viceroy that his tours were royal, but hers, as she put it, were intended 'to open my mind and improve my understanding, because much experience is to be gained by travel'.²⁹ By 1866, she was a veteran of four darbars. **(p.54)** She had been invested with the newly invented order of the Star of India, and, as did her daughter in turn, she often articulated her pride in being the only woman beside Queen Victoria to hold the rank of Knight Commander in the order. Sikandar Begum spoke publicly at these events, and seems to have participated with none of the restrictions of seclusion typical of elite women in this period of any religious background; indeed Rousselet makes her an outspoken opponent of a custom that was as common among elite Rajput women as it was of Muslim. Rousselet, before he reached Bhopal, attended the imperial darbar at Agra in 1866, and his artist sketched the four holders of the Star of India—Gwalior, Jaipur, Jodhpur, and Bhopal—ranged at the viceroy's side, with Sikandar in her 'unisex' court attire standing unveiled among them.

Sikandar Begum also used the occasion of the darbars to see as much of the country as she could, demonstrating in her travels the same kind of curiosity described earlier and renewing both official and princely contacts. After the 1861 darbar, for example, she visited Jaipur, where the maharaja, who called her 'maji', welcomed her with overwhelming ceremony and hospitality, as did the raja of Benaras, where she was delighted at her host's 'kindness and courtesy'. She compared other regimes with her own, learned from some and criticized others, as at Banaras where she was worried by the level of urban sanitation. She cultivated her Mughal bent by her travels to the great cities of Delhi and Agra, and visited lesser sites as well, including Jaunpur, Ayodhya, Lucknow, Cawnpore, and Mathura. She looked at Mathura with the eye of a connoisseur, not that of a believer, commenting that 'we saw hundreds of temples, but preferred that of Mani Ram Seth to all others'. Sikandar and Shah Jahan particularly marvelled at the high quality of the carvings along with the exquisite gardens, but Sikandar gracefully finessed actually making an offering to a circulating god. The final stop was at the great Sufi shrine of Ajmer. The notes Sikandar made on these travels—at least as her daughter later transcribed them—suggest that she was very much part of the new colonialist interest for the most part—*not* in using monuments for their original purposes but in evaluating and 'monumentalizing' them (Kavuri-Bauer 2011). Finally, a transportation and communications infrastructure in the post-1858 period shaped both an imaginative and actual participation in India's geographic space. **(p.55)** Although it would not be completed until after her death, Sikandar took the first

steps towards railway lines within Bhopal, meant to link the state with major cities across the country.

Sikandar's Hajj: The Colonial Administrator Abroad

Sikandar Begum's commitment to rational administration and some dimensions of her identity as a Muslim are evident in the account she left behind of her visit to Mecca. She wrote the account at the suggestion of one of the British residents, H.M. Durand, and colonial officials were surely intended to be at least part of the audience. Sikandar did not think much of the quality of Ottoman rule:

The Sultan of Turkey gives thirty lakhs of rupees ... a year for the expenses incurred in keeping up the holy places at Mecca and Medina. But there is neither cleanliness in the city, nor are there are good arrangements made within the precincts of the shrines. Now if the Sultan would give me those thirty lakhs, I would make arrangements for the Government of Bhopal to be carried on by my son-in-law and daughter, and you would see what a state of order and cleanliness I would keep the august cities in, and what arrangement I would make for the proper maintenance of the holy shrines; so that the Sultan would find out that dishonest people had been diverting his money from its legitimate uses, and had not kept a single thing in order; while I, in a few days, would effect a complete reformation.

(Lambert-Hurley 2007, 127–8)³⁰

A recent edition of Sikandar's account is entitled *A Princess' Pilgrimage* (2007). As the aforementioned lines suggest, any expectations set up by romantic associations triggered by the words 'princess' and 'pilgrimage' would be misplaced. The title might well better be one that sounded more like the product of colonial political culture that it was: 'A personal report on the character and customs of the Hijaz with notes on problems of civility, social relations, sanitation, commerce, transportation, and buildings, as well as the failures of orderly government.'

(p.56) Indeed, Sikandar's short account of her trip to Mecca, written late in her career, might well serve to sum up her political and governing style. She showed herself to be a relentless and efficient worker, concerned, for example, with shipping back to Bhopal the state papers she had carried with her to attend to on the journey (Sikandar Begum [1870, 22]). She managed an entourage of some 1,000 people under trying circumstances. As the Meccan 'sherif' and the Turkish 'pasha' sought both to offer hospitality and control her trip, Sikandar documented the offence of every customs official, staff, and slave for their attention. She kept up a flow of letters, even petitions, and organized interventions when problems emerged. She recorded in minute detail information she gathered, whether from her own observation or from accounts transmitted to her by her entourage. She made her own exhaustive investigations in order to assess the cost and security at stake in continuing the

journey on to Medina. Sikandar had inaugurated a bureaucracy and a 'paper' regime in Bhopal; she strove for efficiency in her administration, and she carried those skills with her.

Very much in the style of colonial ethnographers, moreover, Sikandar Begum surveyed the region with a judgemental and categorizing eye. She described climate, urban design, housing style and layout, availability, and in some cases even costs of goods, foods, and other consumer items, including details on commercial practices and her own social interactions. She wrote down population numbers, ethnic characteristics including work habits, expectations in terms of gifts and bribes, and customs of entertainment. She noted the condition of the forts and discussions related to firearms. Much of what she wrote could have practical importance, whether for the British with their new foothold in Aden, or the Bhopalis with their expanding trade and travel networks in the region.

And, one might add, in the course of this journey, she demonstrated her skills in political relationships and diplomacy. Just as the British in India adopted local customs of the darbar, so did she record herself and her entourage mastering local customs. Soon the Bhopalis were serving coffee and sprinkling rose water as the Arabs did for them, a hint of the ability Sikandar demonstrated equally at home of interacting with the diverse set of actors her regime depended on. There is even a hint in Mecca of the specific ruling strategy noted earlier since she made inquiries about hiring Turkish staff to take back with **(p.57)** her to serve the court in Bhopal. When she was thoroughly frustrated by the incomprehensible and inconvenient arrangements made by the sherif and the pasha, she persuaded them that each side should appoint an intermediary to facilitate understanding among parties who themselves shared neither language nor customs.³¹

The hajj account itself is also a testimonial that Islam itself is no basis for political or other solidarities. Sikandar Begum judged the Arabs generally to be uncivilized and ignorant; their rulers, inept and corrupt. As she pithily put it, 'The manners of these people resemble those of the Gonds [the "tribals" of central India] of former days, who were rough mountaineers that lived by rapine and deeds of violence.' And, as the quotation given above makes clear, she did not give the Turks much credence either. There is no hint here of the concept, which was to appear at century's end, of 'the Muslim world', an imagined geo-cultural image with the Ottoman sultan at its head.

A Person and an Era

Nawab Sikandar Begum fought her way to the throne of Bhopal. She did so not as her ancestors had done by warfare, but by taking on roles and adopting policies that enhanced her core support among the Bhopal elites and resonated with emerging views of proper governing policies on the part of colonial

officials. She was determined, ferociously hard working, inquisitive, inventive, and, until success in her final decade, focused above all on the goal of gaining what she regarded as her absolute entitlement to outright rule. She was unwilling, as she vividly put it, to be a mere *dhaee* (midwife) to enable the power of others.³² That done, perhaps in some combination of boredom with her parochial scene and the curiosity she always demonstrated, she **(p.58)** set out to travel in her last decade as much as she possibly could—at least, at some points, doing so to the detriment of the administration in which she took such pride. Something about the dangerous world of her early years, and, it would seem, both the power she observed in her formidable mother and the familial power she wanted to escape from, made her into such a singular figure. Little about her conforms to widely held stereotypes about Muslim women and Islamic rule.

The snippets of texts given above are a reminder of how much writing came to matter in the colonial era. Sikandar mastered languages and styles of discourse appropriate to rule, initially in the Persian ethical tradition of governance, subsequently in the documentary style of petitions, letters, and addresses like the ones she used to secure her right to rule. She welcomed relationships with officials and travellers who could link her favourably to a larger public, whether through photographs—for which her poses seem nothing less than astonishing—illustrated travelogues like Rousselet's; or the memoirs and biographies of officials, such as those of the political agents Macpherson and H.M. Durand. She kept notes of her travels, in the case of tours within India to be published after her death by her daughter, and in the case of the hajj, subsequently translated and published by the wife of one of the political agents, primarily intended for a receptive official audience. These all are documents that enter into multiple public spheres defined by Persian, Urdu, English, and in Rousselet's case not only French but other European languages as well.

Singular in so many ways, Sikandar's life thus also illustrates larger themes of the time, not only in regard to the geographically expansive public of the day, but also in regard to gender, national consciousness (though certainly not 'nationalism'), Muslim identity, and powerful new discourses of ethnography and classification, to which she was subject and of which she was a part. If there was a single image she fostered, it was nothing other than the era's call to 'improvement', in her case, from *uml* (including women's right to succession) to ritual fidelity to improving travel.

'With the Begum Secunder of Bhopal, who died on the 30th of last October, has passed away the best by far of all the native sovereigns of India of our time, the ablest, wisest, most enlightened and most fortunate' (Mukhopadhyaya 1869, 1). It is hard not to see all the praise heaped on Sikandar Begum as an implicit critique of male princes (as **(p.59)** true for the English-educated Bengali gentleman writer of this quote as for the British).³³ Praise or blame aside,

Sikandar's period of rule, spanning the key two decades at mid-nineteenth century, was one when new goals of administrative and legal regularity came into play, new cultural themes of improvement became current, rule emerged onto a national stage, and a woman like Sikandar could, in fact, operate as a ruler who simply happened not to be a man.

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Notes:

(¹) 'Papers Regarding the Second Marriage of Nawab Jahangir Mohd Khan of Bhopal 1839', National Archives of India, Bhopal Political Agency Vernacular (1819–1920), Part IV.

(²) Besides her natal kin, Qudsiyya had the support of the two other most powerful families in Bhopal at the time, a military family, also Pathans, and a family of Roman Catholics claiming royal French Bourbon origin, whose founder had taken service, after a classic story of a French duel and kidnapping by pirates, at Akbar's court. One scion of that family, Balthazar, known as Shahzad Masih (date of poisoning in 1829), had been a key negotiator of the agreement with the British. Both families accompanied Qudsiyya and Sikandar to Islamnagar. For details on the Bourbons and court life generally, see Khan (2000).

(³) According to the political agent in Bhopal, Jahangir married a woman secretly who gave birth to a daughter—a courtesan gave birth to the son. See Captain

H.W. Trevelyan, Poll. Agent in Bhopal, to R.N.C. Hamilton, Esq., Resident at Indore, no. 289, dated Sehore, 3 Aug 1844 (British Library: P/196/61, Con 12 Oct 1844, no. 148).

(⁴) Major General Nawab Mohsinul Mulk Hajji Muhammad ‘Ubaidullah Khan (1930). See, in particular, the account of the great uprising of 1857–8, when the dispossessed of all kinds, including a handful of rivals to Sikandar Begum, found an occasion to rise up in the hope of change (Khan, 32–68).

(⁵)

Girls who waste their time in playing with dolls or listening to stories are left in a state of ignorance. And yet there are women—those who have understood the value of time, and have spent it in useful pursuits—who have become famous and celebrated in the world in the same way as men. Such women were Nur Jehan begam, and Zebunnisa begam; and in these days the nawab Sikandar begam, or the English Princess, Queen Victoria. They are women who have administered the affairs of nations—of the whole world, not of a little home and family. (Ahmad 2001, 8)

The *Miratul ‘urus* was first published in Urdu in 1869; the translation was first published in London in 1903.

(⁶) For the Rohilla Pathans of Farukhabad, however, Rosalind O’Hanlon, countering Ashis Nandy’s argument in favour of gender malleability in this era, argues that women were limited to inner spaces, where they preserved their respective sacred traditions, whereas men—Rajput, Maratha, and Afghan—shared a common outdoor world of militant masculinity, ‘where the sectional values and identities of the household receded’ (O’Hanlon 2005).

(⁷) See image by James Waterhouse, ‘Her Highness Nawab Sekunder, Begum, G.C.S.I. Bhopal’, for a portrait of Sikandar Begum along the lines of this description (Waterhouse 1862).

(⁸) Reproductions of the Bhopal photographs can be viewed in the New York Public Library Digital Collections (for details, see the sources listed under ‘Images’).

(⁹) ‘The Lady Wife’ was Sikandar’s confidante, herself of British-Pathan descent, the widow of the late prime minister who was part of the large family in Bhopal, noted above, claiming French Bourbon descent.

(¹⁰) The quotation does add ‘except, perhaps Seetamhow...’ (quoted in Falconer 2009, 46–7). For a description of the Bourbons, see Rousellet (1876, 453–5).

(¹¹) Quoted in Durand (1883, 143).

(¹²) A *peri* or *pari* is a figure from Persian mythology imagined as a 'fairy' or a beautiful female spirit; the reference here is presumably to courtesans. Princely Lucknow's wealthy and educated courtesans were celebrated as key to the cultural life of the city, and those of the court were especially notable. See the notes and images of an exhibition on Lucknow in 2010 at the Los Angeles County Museum (available at <http://www.lacma.org/history-memory>).

(¹³) Captain W.H. Sleeman (1788–1856), who under the governor-generalship of W. Bentinck was charged with eliminating the *thags* of central India associated with pillaging and assassinations.

(¹⁴) The reference is to alternate arrangements for the payment of land taxes.

(¹⁵) S.C. Macpherson, Bhopal, 21 February 1854, quoted in Macpherson (1865, 295).

(¹⁶) A widely quoted statement, for example, in Playne, Solomon, Bond, and Wright (2006, 59).

(¹⁷) J.D. Cunningham to Resident, 29 April 1849, quoted in Yaduvansh (1965, 229–31).

(¹⁸) In this, she built on a transition undertaken in fact under (if not by) the hapless Jahangir, who had laid out a new quarter to the southeast of the city as a cantonment, suitably named 'Jahangirabad' and served by a well-designed aqueduct.

(¹⁹) There are many editions and repackagings of Rousselet's travels. The drawing of the court scene under the trees is from an 1878 edition (for details, see the sources listed under 'Images'). The account, with the *chaukidars* deemed guilty, can be found in Rousselet (1876, 441–2). For an analysis of the transformation of courts in the company period, see Raman (2012). See the source listed under 'Images': courtscene1878.jpg

(²⁰) In accepting the marriage, the political agent replied that 'the terms of Her Highness's letter were in accordance with English customs, when Her Gracious Majesty was Sovereign, and her Consort had no voice in matters of Stat' (Shahjahan, Begum of Bhopal 1876, 61).

(²¹) The leaders were Fazil Muhammad Khan and Adil Muhammad Khan of Ambapani. They may have been descendants of the rebel, Sultan Muhammad Khan, that is, supporters of the junior line (this was the opinion of one Mr Ansari at National Archives of India in Bhopal). Muhammad 'Ubaidullah Khan (1930, 32–68).

(²²) Sikandar Begum to Agent to the Governor General for Central India (AGGCI), 31 March 1859, quoted in Shahjahan, Begum of Bhopal (1876, 66–8).

(²³) J.D. Cunningham to Resident, 29 April 1849, quoted in Yaduvansh (1965, 229–31).

(²⁴) This interpretation differs from what is often taken as inevitable, namely that Muslim rulers aspire to ‘Islamic’ models for rule. Indeed, a recent history of the regime identified Sikandar Begum’s goals, beginning with her recognition as ruler in 1847, precisely as Islamic ones: ‘Sikander Begum regarded it as her first duty to remodel Bhopal from an Afghan warrior principality to a centralized State *along Islamic lines*’ (Preckel 2000, 49; italics added).

(²⁵) As Farhat Hasan has shown in his study of eighteenth-century courts in Gujarat, the term *shari‘a*, far from enjoining specific laws, by this period, was used even by non-Muslims describing or demanding justice (Hasan 2004). See also Richards (1984, 255–89).

(²⁶) Adding, in a rather patronizing tone, that the new mosque ‘gives some notion of what Indians are still capable of doing—even now, after so many centuries of decay’ (Rousselet 1876, 452).

(²⁷) In fact, of course, there were temples, even if commanding less visibility on the skyline.

(²⁸) When Raja Khushwaqt Rai, her cherished and loyal first minister, died in the early 1850s, she brought to the court from Awadh one Munshi Jamaluddin. He became her most important minister and confidant and her link to two important networks, of which one was the Persianate service bureaucracy in north India, and the second, a scholarly network reaching to Arabia. Jamaluddin was a person of considerable Islamic learning, drawn to the reformist thought of Hadrami-based scholars in the tradition of Muhammad al-Shawkani (d. 1834), and he stimulated the arrival of several scholars from Yemen, who were regarded as an adornment to the distinction of the Bhopal court.

(²⁹) Sikandar Begum to the Foreign Secretary, Agra, 1863. Quoted in Shahjahan, Begum of Bhopal (1876, 97).

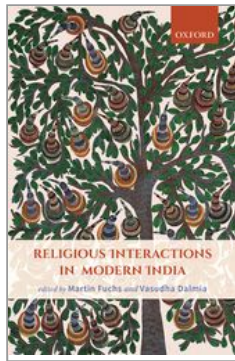
(³⁰) From the original edition translated by Willoughby-Osbourne (London: Wm. H. Allen, 1870) and recently reprinted (2007). The original Urdu is apparently not extant.

(³¹) For all the problems, she acknowledged her appreciation of cultivating mutual ties, as she always did, with fellow rulers, bonds that enhanced her status in her state and beyond. She said to the sherif of Mecca in the course of one testy exchange on his failed arrangements, ‘[Despite the misunderstandings that occurred] I only consider my one object, which is to perform the pilgrimage, and to cement the friendship existing between the Sherif’s family and my own’ (Sikandar Begum 2007 ed., 58–9).

(³²) Mukhopadhyaya (1869, 7) and, even more contemptuously, 2, 'a Dowager *Dhaee* [*sic.* for *da'i*'].

(³³) In this, distaste for the princes met elite Bengali anxiety over masculinity. The *Hindoo Patriot*, where the tract cited immediately above was first published, opposed the 1857 uprising in part because of its figurehead of the Mughal ruler.

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The Evasive Guru and the Errant Wife

Anti-hagiography, Śaivism, and Anxiety in Colonial South India¹

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Abstract and Keywords

The chapter discusses a conflict within the Śaiva Siddhānta tradition in what is present-day Tamil Nadu. The conflict concerned was started in the 1860s by an attack of Arumuga Navalar, a Śaivite scholar, who represented a form of religious neo-traditionalism, on Ramalinga Swamigal, a modern Śaiva poet and self-styled *siddha*. The struggle revolved around the definition of the Śaivite canon. Navalar was upset by Ramalinga's success with the songs he had composed, a collection of which was published in 1867 under the name *Tiruvārūṭpā*. Navalar, highly critical of extant practices, especially of those of lower-caste people, opposed the acceptance of Ramalinga and his songs as being on par with those of the earlier poet-saints. The author places this conflict in the context of changes of earlier polemical literary traditions regarding the attitude to the past. The author sees Navalar as pursuing a deliberate 'Protestantization' of Śaivism, laying down new lines of exclusion and inclusion.

Keywords: Śaiva Siddhānta, Arumuga Navalar, Ramalinga Swamigal, Tiruvārūṭpā, 'Protestantization', Śaivite canon

In 1869, a Tamil pamphlet of modest length was published (no more perhaps than twenty pages in all) titled *The Refutation of the False Songs of Divine Grace* (*pōliyarūṭpā maruppu*; henceforth *The Refutation*) in Madras.² On the title page, the author was given as **(p.63)** one Māvaṇṭūr Tiyaṅkēca Mutaliyār but, very soon, it was commonly acknowledged that the pamphlet was actually the work of Mutaliyār's illustrious teacher, one of the most influential lay religious leaders³

to emerge in the first half of the nineteenth century in Sri Lanka and the Tamil region of India, Arumuga Navalar (1822–79) of Jaffna. The text targeted, in very strong terms, another religious figure of the same period—Ramalinga Swamigal (1823–1874). *The Refutation* immediately triggered a pamphlet war that continued to rage for a good half-a-century after it first emerged, involving, as Venkatachalapathy (2010, 38) has pointed out, the who's who of the Tamil literary scene from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century. In other words, something about this text mattered deeply for the religious and cultural literati of the Tamil country at that time. This chapter is about this text, with a view to exploring why it had such a significant afterlife. Reading it as an anti-hagiography, I hope to explore some of its hitherto unexplored ramifications and its significance for the transformation of Tamil religion in colonial modernity.⁴ But, first, let us turn to the historical events that lead to its making.

(p.64) The Persons Involved and the Narrative

When we speak of nineteenth-century religious lay leaders in the Tamil country, no more contrasting figures could come to mind than Ramalinga Swamigal and Arumuga Navalar. The life of Ramalinga Swamigal (1823–74) might be summed up as follows: low-caste Vēḷḷāla origins; place of inspiration Chidambaram; deprivation and poverty throughout his life; childhood education in traditional Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta religious literature in Madras; early literary genius that blossoms into a vast corpus of literature called the *Tiruvārūṭpā*; later departure into the wilderness; visions and powers pertaining to self-styled *siddha*-hood (a possessor of charismatic powers); founding of a new and conspicuously unsuccessful religious order; a religious message that focused on the alleviation of hunger and poverty; and mysterious final disappearance in 1874.⁵

Arumuga Navalar, in contrast, came from a very different social and regional background. Born in Jaffna, he was part of the Kārkāṭṭa Vēḷḷāla caste group, which saw itself as the elite custodian of Tamil Śaivism for centuries, retaining continuous historical links with Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta in southern India. This long-standing religious and literary relationship facilitated Navalar's acceptance among the Tamil Śaivite orthodoxy and his success in southern India after 1849. By the time he made his entrance in the southern Indian scene, his reputation as a Śaivite scholar and as a meticulous editor and printer of texts had preceded him. So too his reputation as a fierce defender of a Tamil Śaivism that, addressing as it did a modern Śaiva public, was sought to be created as a counterpart to Protestant Christianity (which he attacked brilliantly in several polemical tracts).⁶ In 1864, he came **(p.65)** to visit Ramalinga's territory—the temple town of Chidambaram, the hub of Tamil Śaivite orthodoxy—to establish a school there along the lines of the one in Jaffna. There were a few encounters between the two men—the one a vigorous and opinionated religious entrepreneur, the other a William Blake-like figure, a visionary, a prophet, and, like many such, of a maddening inconsistency. It would not be too speculative to speak of a genuine, mutual antipathy, in which caste differences played an

implicit role. The antipathy lead to a lawsuit—the details of which are less important than to note two facts about it—one is that Ramalinga lost the legal case. The second matter, of greater import, lies in Navalar's level of comfort with law and his easy recourse to it, an ease which, as we shall see, was germane to his understanding of authenticity, representation, and writing.

Texts and Counter-Texts

The broad outlines of the textual dispute that emerged as the result of the confrontation is as follows:⁷

1. In 1867, the first edition of Ramalinga Swamigal's selected poetry was brought out as *Tiruvaruṭpā* under the editorship of Toḷuvūr Vēlayuta Mutaliyār.
2. In Chidambaram, Arumuga Navalar began to criticize his work in the Friday discourses, in continuation of the tradition established at Jaffna.
3. The Tiruvaruṭpā camp, consisting of Ramalinga Swamigal's well-wishers and disciples, took action in print in 1868. The first publication was *The Redressal of the Calumnies against the Tiruvaruṭpā (Tiruvaruṭpā Dūṣaṇa Parihāram)* of Tirumayilai Caṇmukam Piḷḷai.
4. In October 1868, Ci.Vai. Tāmōtaram Piḷḷai, Navalar's disciple, advertised the imminent publication of Navalar's edition of the **(p.66)** grammatical work *Tolkāppiyam Collatikāram*. The advertisement blurb included conspicuous praise of Navalar as the greatest Tamil scholar of his time.
5. The Tiruvaruṭpā camp seized upon this advertisement as additional provocation that implicitly devalued other Tamil scholars. The antagonism, on their part, took on the additional dimension of Tamil literary culture in Madras and environs versus Jaffna/Īlam literary culture. A scurrilous pamphlet was now published by one Naraciṅkapura Vīrācāmi Mutaliyār, called *A Letter-Petition (Vijñāpanap Pattirikai)*, it came out the same year and provoked an immediate counter-response, *The Burning of the Light of Good Sense (Nallaṟivu Cuṭar Koḷuttutal)* of Navalar's disciple Civapātenēca Piḷḷai. The attacks and counter-attacks culminated in 1869 in the two works that defined the controversy: *The Refutation*, attributed to Māvaṇṭūr Tiyaḱēca Mutaliyār but later acknowledged to be the work of Navalar himself (see Caravaṇaṇ 2010, 696), and the response to it by Toḷuvūr Vēlayuta Mutaliyār with the ponderous title *The Refutation of the Refutation of the False Songs of Divine Grace or the Great Axe Which Destroys That Which Causes False Reasoning (Pōliyaruṭpā Maruppiṇ Khaṇḍanam Allatu Kutarkkāraṇiya Nāsamahāparaśu)*.

Navalar's *The Refutation* or the Unmasking of Ramalinga Swamigal *The Refutation* is a work whose rhetorical and stylistic features can best be understood through a comparison with Navalar's other famous polemical tracts, particularly the 1854 *Destruction of the Calumnies against Śaivism* (*Śaivadūṣaṇaparihāram*), which he wrote to tackle Protestant Christian missionary polemics in Jaffna. This tract that catapulted Navalar into fame as the champion of Śaivism has been seen as 'successful translation of the terms of Protestant Christianity into the conceptual world of Caivam' (Ambalavanar 2006, 15).⁸ In terms of framework, rhetorical style, and aims, *The Refutation* is very similar to missionary tracts. Thus, *Destruction of the Calumnies against Śaivism* (p.67) begins also as an edifying text: Christian missionaries attack Śaiva religion and gain adherents among Śaivites because the latter are both gullible and ignorant—they do not know enough about their own religion. It is this gap that Navalar will now step in and redress—he will expose missionary polemics as false and show his fellow Śaivites what they should believe in (Ambalavanar 2006, 66–150). Similarly, *The Refutation* is about exposing Ramalinga Swamigal in order to educate a gullible public about both his true nature and the real Śaiva canon. Thus, a detailed comparison of Navalar's first polemical tract and *The Refutation* would give us a good sense of his hermeneutical strategies and ideological moves in general.⁹ But this is not the intention of this chapter. Rather, we are going to be looking at how, in *The Refutation*, Ramalinga Swamigal is shifted from a world of hagiographical perfection into a world of biographical ambivalence, into a form of thinking about the holy life as constructed of subterfuges and lies, of gaps and contradictions, that had to be mercilessly exposed—in short, to write the biography of a holy scoundrel. Yet, we will see that *The Refutation* is a remarkable document, not so much for what it consciously sets out to achieve as what it unwittingly does, complicating the question of what we can know and how much we can know about a person, showing the unreliability of facts in that they might well generate the effect opposite of that which they intend to generate. For, an anti-hagiography may, in fact, create empathy and affection for the very subject that it seeks to satirize and debunk. Further, Navalar's tract is a document that functions as the fulcrum or pivot around which hagiographical and biographical interpretations of Ramalinga Swamigal revolve—pushing them in the direction of rejecting its premises by transcending them, moving Ramalinga Swamigal into a space beyond the claims of traditional Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta.

The True Aruṭpā

The Refutation begins by giving us an outline of how Śaiva religion is to be understood in terms of its canonical literature and its holy (p.68) persons. This is a framework not so much to enlighten an ignorant audience as to remind a learned and discerning one about the intramural parameters of the tradition, that which all within the community have agreed upon. Navalar begins by discussing which texts of the Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta are collectively called the Aruṭpā. In doing so he selects five works from the canon of twelve texts of Tamil

Śaiva devotional poetry collectively called the *Tirumurai*. He explains that these five are the *Tēvāram*, the *Tiruvācakam*, the *Tiruvicaippā*, the *Tiruppallāṇṭu*, and the *Periyapurāṇam*. These five, he tells us, function as the ordained, sacred utterances for daily and occasional rituals, both private and public, for Śaivism.¹⁰ Composed by a few among those 63 poet-saints who are considered teachers of the doctrine of Śaiva Siddhānta (*samayācāryas*),¹¹ these teachings known as the Aruṭpā are considered to be a product of those poet-saints (*nāyaṇmār*) whose sensory instruments are no longer subjected to the cycle of transmigration but have become divine. Therefore, these works too are not of human but of divine origin (Caravaṇaṇ 2010, 698).¹² In stating this Navalār also produces the list of authorities for this assertion: Śiva himself who is omniscient, the sages who have worshipped him, and **(p.69)** the Kailāśa lineage of preceptors (*santānācārya*).¹³ The texts that assert these truths are mentioned in the Purāṇas such as the *Kūrmapurāṇa*, the *Vāyupurāṇa*, and the *Śivarahasya* (Caravaṇaṇ 2010, 698–69).¹⁴ Thus, *The Refutation* lays the groundwork for establishing the authority of the canon of Śaiva Siddhānta as a preface to establishing the lack of such sanctioned authority for Ramalinga Swamigal’s poetry. This view of Navalār, of the divinity of the Śaiva canon, it has been suggested, was unique to a Sri Lankan literary tradition as opposed to a more ‘secular’ account of the Tamil literary canon in Tamil Nadu. A Sri Lankan literary tradition also shared by other compatriots of Arumuga Navalār, by scholars such as Capāpati Nāvalār (1845–1903), who wrote the treatise *The Dravidian Illumination (Trāviṭa Prakācikai)* in 1899, asserting the divine origin and authority of the Śaiva sacred scriptures known as the *āgamas* (see Venkatachalapathy 2010, 166–7). Yet, this view of a division between a supposedly sacralizing Sri Lankan account of the origins of the Tamil canon as opposed to a **(p.70)** secularist mainland Tamil one is incorrect, as both early Tamil literary histories and the Śaiva Siddhānta literature itself illustrate. Thus, the linking of the Śaiva āgamas with the Vedas and both with divine origin, originating in Śiva himself, goes back to the earliest strata of Śaiva Siddhānta literature. So too does an alternative model of seeing the Tamil language and literature from its inception as linked to the sage Agastya and, through the latter *who receives it through divine instruction and not through his own human efforts*, to Śiva and the Śaivite religious tradition.¹⁵ It is by drawing upon these older literary tropes and cultural projects that Arumuga Navalār presents his view of what constitutes Songs of Grace in the nineteenth century. Yet, it is clear that Navalār’s restriction of the notion, if not the name, of a corpus of poetry that is divinely inspired to the authors of the *Tirumurai* alone is a somewhat specious argument in the light of notions of literary inspiration and canonicity in Śaiva Siddhānta. While the *Tirumurai* occupies a special, sacrosanct position, the tradition also constantly acknowledges the emergence of post-*Tirumurai* religious poetry that was divinely inspired. As late as the fifteenth century (Aruṇakirinātar) or the seventeenth–eighteenth centuries (Tāyumāṇavar), the story of the poet-saint who was first an ordinary, uninspired mortal who has a

life-changing encounter and, through it, becomes divinely inspired and composes his poetry remained a standard hagiographical topos.¹⁶ **(p.71)** What, therefore, motivated Navalar's determination to delimit this notion to the *Tirumuṟai* was to demonstrate a large temporal gap between those Śaiva saints who were, long ago, divinely inspired and those of yesteryear and today who cannot be allowed to inhabit this same religious status. We shall return to this theme again and conjecture as to why this might be the case in *The Refutation*.

Next, this framework for canonical authority in place, Navalar turns to new and dubious developments in the Tamil, religious world:

Nowadays, a person called Karuṅkuḷi Irāmaliṅka Piḷḷai has sung a few songs with the intention of having people worship him through believing that he has obtained the experience of Śiva (*śivānubhūti*).¹⁷ Naming them, entirely on his own, the *Tiruvaruṭpā* and himself Tiruvaruṭpirakāca Vaḷḷalār, he has, through one of his students, had a *purāṇa* done for [the text], called *The History of the Tiruvaruṭpā*, for himself, appended it to the text, had it printed and thus objectified it. Seeing this, some witless persons, considering Irāmaliṅka Piḷḷai equal to the *samayācāryas* [Appar, Cuntarar, Tiruñāṭacamantar and Māṇikkavācakar], praising his poetry as equivalent to that of the *Tēvāram* and *Tiruvācakam*, worshipping it, recite it when they are doing daily ritual, *pūjā*, getting *śivadarśana* etc. On some occasions, during the time of the festivals (*utsavas*), in certain temples in Ceṇṇapaṭṭiṇam, they have stopped the recitation of the *Tēvāram* etc., and recite only Irāmaliṅka Piḷḷai's songs.

There is no other reason for why these poor wretches are infatuated and led astray other than that he and his disciples are roaming around saying that it is stated in both Irāmaliṅka Piḷḷai's own songs and that of his disciples that he has obtained God's grace, that he knows alchemy and that he has performed several miracles. Therefore, out of compassion for those poor wretches, some of his songs and sayings are taken up here to demonstrate clearly that he has not in the least obtained **(p.72)** God's grace, and that he has undertaken to trick people and win false fame for himself. (Caravaṇaṇ 2010, 699)

Let us consider some of the implications of this opening salvo. The first shot is delivered when Navalar calls Ramalinga Swamigal Karuṅkuḷi Irāmaliṅka Piḷḷai. A significant aspect of the hagiographical narrative that centred around Ramalinga Swamigal from the earliest days was to shift his location, and hence also his identity, from the places where he was born (Marutūr) and lived (Madras, Karuṅkuḷi, and Mēṭṭukkuppam) to the place to which his religious identity is tied—particularly in his poetry and his religious activities in the latter years of his life—Chidambaram. Thus, the title page of Toḷuvūr Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār's first edition of the *Tiruvaruṭpā* underscores this claim with the

words, *‘Tiruvārūṭpā* as uttered graciously by Citamparam Irāmaliṅka Piḷḷai known as Tiruvārūṭpirakāca Vallālār’ (Ūraṭ Aṭikaḷ 1976, 328).¹⁸ Navalar’s replacement of Chidambaram with the name of the actual place where Ramalinga Swamigal resided at the time of the publication of the poetry, Karuṅkuḷi, does several things—it denies him and his disciples the right to associate him with the aura attached to Chidambaram as the location of Śaivite orthodoxy as much as it denies him and his disciples the exclusive right to naming him. Navalar abrogates this right to do so because, as he argues, the conferring of a religious title on a work or its author can only be authorized by others not by oneself nor by one’s intimate acquaintances. As von Bruck and Bodenhorn (2009) have pointed out, ‘That identities can be stolen, traded, suspended, and even erased through the name reveals the profound, political power located in the capacity to name; it illustrates the property-like potential in names to transact social value; and it brings into view the powerful connection between name and self-identity’. One might add to this the significance of the name as adding to religious status and value. Hence, by de-naming and then renaming Ramalinga Swamigal, Navalar is also suspending and annihilating the intimate contact between the poet-saint and the locale/locales with which traditional Śaivite hagiography associates **(p.73)** a poet-saint—the temporal place where Śiva resides, which he sings of in his poetry and where he enters into an intimate relationship with the divine.¹⁹ De-naming Ramalinga Swamigal is the first step in delegitimizing the claims made both by him and his followers—claims pertaining to alchemy, magic, and miracles. It is the first step in checking his popularity among the poor and in the temple-context, where the influence of his poetry is strikingly in evidence. Exposing Ramalinga Swamigal as a confidence trickster would be to strip away the charisma and erode his popularity. Here, Navalar’s own agenda for regulating temple-based worship—removing it from corrupt, sadly degenerate, and constantly innovative local custom and usage and returning it to ‘tradition’, to an āgamic textually prescribed form of Śaiva worship—is very much in evidence.²⁰ From this perspective, Ramalinga Swamigal’s form of Śaivism in its popularity seems to pose a particular danger to Navalar’s reformist agenda, its very attractiveness to the masses subverting the return to a new textual orthodoxy, to an invented tradition. In considering how to stem Ramalinga Swamigal’s popularity, Navalar seems to have felt that the only way to do so was through a form of investigative anti-hagiography, debunking systematically the chief claims regarding Ramalinga’s holiness. This is what he next proceeds to do.

Miracles

The first claim is that Ramalinga Swamigal attained levels of great scholarly and spiritual knowledge without ever learning or being taught by anyone. The hagiographers, as I had shown earlier, speak of this as ‘knowing without memorization’ (*ōtātu uṇartal*) and attribute this acquisition of knowledge to the grace of God.²¹ Navalar first **(p.74)** quotes a verse from the fourth book of the

Tiruvārūṭpā, addressed to Naṭarāja at Chidambaram, where Ramalinga speaks of how God had graced him by giving him the ability to learn without learning.²² He supplements this with verse 21 from Toḷuvūr Vēlayuta Mutaliyār's praise-poem, which reiterates this same trope only now also carried over to Ramalinga Swamigal's disciples. Vēlayuta Mutaliyār states that just as his master had learnt without being taught, he teaches his disciples without educating them.²³ The explicit comparison here, as Navalar also agrees, is with Tiruñāṇacampantar, who drank the goddess's milk as a three-year-old child and achieved instant erudition (**p.75**) and insight. Seeing this hagiographical motif applied to not just Ramalinga Swamigal but also his students infuriates Navalar. He asks sarcastically:

If it is true that Irāmaliṅka Piḷḷai and his disciples learnt without memorizing, then did they not study with anyone using palm-leaves? Have not several people seen that they have done this? Is this not like trying to hide a whole pumpkin inside one's food? If it is said we know everything without being taught, then does this mean all languages? Or does it mean only the two languages of Sanskrit and Tamil? Or just Tamil? Does it mean all the books written in Tamil? Or is it restricted to the three known as grammar, literature and scriptures (*jñānasāstra*)? If this is the case, how is he going to excuse the mistakes in his published works?²⁴

This passage articulates a historical position that reconfigures the attitude towards the miraculous without fundamentally endangering religious belief. Here, the miraculous event—that of being taught by God—is not repudiated but, as we saw earlier, shifted back to a distant time, to semi-mythical personages. Navalar is, in effect, saying that this was true of Tiruñāṇacampantar; indeed this is an article of faith that the *samayācāryas* did perform miraculous deeds, but this is not true of Ramalinga Swamigal. In the case of the latter, quotidian reality intrudes: Ramalinga Swamigal is a mere mortal, people have seen him pouring over palm leaves; they have seen him teaching his disciples. Hence, the claims are not tenable. Exaggeration abounds—reason poses hard-hitting questions that undermines the claims, unravels the contemporary story while preserving the pristine and miraculous Śaiva past. The claim of being in possession of knowledge acquired through divine grace is also attacked in other ways. Navalar gives a long list of scribal and theological errors in Ramalinga Swamigal's published works to show the deficiencies in his learning. Listing approximately 25 or so linguistic errors in Ramalinga Swamigal's 1851 edition of Kaṇṇuṭaiya Vaḷḷal's *Conduct of Self-Restraint in the Final Stage* (*Oḷivil Oṭukkam*), Navalar makes a mockery of his erudition and questions whether anyone with such poor scholarly credentials can be considered as endowed with special knowledge (Caravaṇaṇ 2010, 701). This section of *The Refutation* also gestures to the cultural attitudes that (**p.76**) centred around publishing and printing in the mid-nineteenth century, where printing seemed to offer a new, historical opportunity to both bolster or criticize and shatter scholarly reputations.²⁵

Demolishing Ramalinga Swamigal's worldly reputation as a learned scholar becomes part of the two-pronged strategy to unravel his divine reputation.

Next, Navalar proceeds to return to the theme of specific claims in Ramalinga Swamigal's poetry. He quotes a verse from the fourth book of the *Tiruvārūṭṭā* where Ramalinga Swamigal speaks of the divine epiphany in his life when a water lamp burnt like a ghee lamp in front of the temple.²⁶ Quoting, in addition, verses composed by Ramalinga's disciples that celebrate this event, Navalar seeks hard evidence for it. If Ramalinga Swamigal is able to accomplish such a miracle, one that has been formerly attributed to the mythical saint Namināṇṭi Aṭikaḷ Nāyaṇār in the *Periyapurāṇam*, then he should perform it in front of a large audience consisting of also fellow religionists and others and set any doubts regarding his powers to rest.²⁷ Similarly, several hundred of Ramalinga Swamigal's verses, says Navalar, speak of how Śiva-Naṭarāja came and took hold of him in his waking state, how he obtained sight of him, and how God embraced and caressed him and told him things (Caravaṇaṇ 2010, 702–4).²⁸ If this is the case, challenges *The Refutation*:

[If all this is true] then, like the *samayācāryas*, he should perform miracles (*adbhuta*) that people can witness, like awakening the dead etc., and annihilating other religions, he could establish the Śaiva religion (Caravaṇaṇ 2010, 704)!

(p.77) Obtaining God's grace, Navalar continues, is for one's own satisfaction (*ātma-sukha*) not for the satisfaction of others. One need not make a book out of this experience and proclaim it to others. One need not give oneself special names. One need not speak of special powers or invent purāṇic stories to the effect of having incarnated to make Śaivism flourish. Nor have one's sister's son, Cuntaram Piḷḷai, write that it is he, Ramalinga and not Śiva who can destroy the bonds of transmigration of all the souls. With these words Navalar ends the section of *The Refutation* devoted to addressing the issues of religious authority and miracles in the context of the Śaivite, holy life.

In seeking to understand this discourse, we also need to see that there exists very little scholarship that has looked at the genealogy of terms that might or might not approximate the Judaeo-Christian sense of the term 'miracle' in the context of South Asian religions.²⁹ The few significant works, both published and unpublished, that have done so are in general agreement that a crucial Western distinction that pertains between 'magic' and 'miracles', where magic is seen as a means of exercising power and the miracle as a proof of being anointed, of holiness on earth, of the intrusion of the 'religious' into the 'secular' sphere, does not bear upon South Asian materials, both textual and oral. Rather, as Granoff (1996) and Fiordalis (2008), among others, suggest, South Asian materials see magical powers, as often mediated by yogic powers and meditation, as also a result of these and, hence, as reflective of learnt

capabilities that might or might not be the result of stages of spiritual advancement and greater virtue. The scholarly awareness of ‘miracles’ as a religious phenomenon that needs to be considered as common to several religious traditions is reflected in the description of these as, ‘manifestations of the **(p.78)** supernatural power of the divine being fulfilling his purpose in history, but they are also caused to occur “naturally” by charismatic figures who have succeeded in controlling their consciousness through vision, dreams, or practices of meditation’ (Waida 2005, 6049). In this context, Granoff’s 1996 article is particularly interesting for its broad typology of Buddhist miracles in the period spanning second century BCE to fifth century CE, particularly as found in the *Avadāna* literature about the Buddha’s past lives, and what it might tell us about the Buddhist attitude towards miracles. Granoff suggests that we can, broadly speaking, distinguish between miracles that are concerned with external circumstances, such as conversion, and those that are concerned with the internal matters of the community, such as appealing to faith. The *Mahāyāna* scriptures regularly demonstrate that miraculous powers are particularly effective tools of conversion and, as performed by the Buddha and certain senior monks, they become a means of convincing non-believers about the superiority of Buddhist doctrine. In contrast to this, there are certain kinds of miracles that are not necessarily aimed at an external audience but are in circulation among the faithful as a means of reinforcing belief. But, and this issue is crucial, all miracles need to be contextualized and it becomes crucial to distinguish who is doing them for what purpose. Since, from the Buddhist perspective, miracles can be done by anyone who has acquired certain powers, regardless of their religious affiliation, it is possible for non-Buddhists to replicate the Buddha’s deed for purposes of trickery and deceit. There is nothing in miracles that is intrinsically self-validating, that can vouch for their ethical purpose. Navalar’s challenge flung at Ramalinga Swamikal can be usefully interpreted in the light of this twofold typology of miracles that must, nevertheless, be considered a heuristic device and no more, for there is considerable overlap between the two categories. Navalar is challenging Ramalinga to perform his miracles in front of others in order to convert them to Śaiva religion. This type of miracle is also to be found in the medieval Śaiva hagiographical literature, especially the *Periyapurāṇam*, as well as the Vaiṣṇava hagiographies, such as the *Guruparamparās*.³⁰ In challenging Ramalinga Swamikal to do **(p.79)** miracles as a means to conversion, Navalar is arguing from a position that, at least in this context, accepts the possibility of miracles within certain holy lives. We do not see a rational discomfort with them, as we will in later biographies of Ramalinga Swamikal. At the same time, the challenge has several implications. One explicit assumption, which Navalar himself states, is that Ramalinga will decline to perform miracles of conversion because he is not interested in converting anyone to Śaivism. He is, in other words, not a true Śaivite himself. This is

because Ramalinga has abrogated several powers to himself that only Śiva can possess, thus espousing a form of Śaivism that is far from orthodox.

The second, implicit, issue is closely connected to the nature of miraculous deeds themselves, their capacity for deception, and the ambivalent status of miracle workers particularly within the context of colonial British India. In simultaneously challenging Ramalinga Swamigal to do his miracles while condemning him for doing so, saying that religious achievement is a private matter concerning only oneself, Navalār is decrying public displays of religious virtuosity and liminality much as the British administrators did. And even for the same kind of reasons—because the charisma of popular, itinerant religious figures threatened established institutional structures and authority. We shall return to this point later.

The next sections of *The Refutation* concentrate on exposing the gap between claims and reality. Navalār begins by speaking of Ramalinga Swamigal's stated goals and continues to savagely mock the discrepancies between words and deeds, between claims and reality:

'It is now several years since his [Ramalinga Swamigal's] disciples have tom-tomed in shops, in institutions and in houses that Śiva has taught alchemy to Irāmaliṅka Piḷḷai; that he has made and kept six *pārams* of gold; that he is going to build a city called Pārvatīpuram and, within it, a golden hall where he was going to have Śiva-Naṭarāja come and stand so that the whole world may see; that he was going to give food to all the hungry; that he was going to cure the sick of their diseases; that he was going to educate all those who wanted schooling. It is now more than **(p.80)** two years since he laid the foundations for his city. Why has all this not yet happened? ... If he is someone who knows alchemy then why does he go around begging for money and grain from several people? Why is he reviled by others for taking petty loans and not repaying them? Why are his *Tiruvārūtpā* editions pawned against his debts? Does not the poverty of someone who calls himself an alchemist, the disease of someone who calls himself a great physician, the betelnut-stained-spittle that others aim at someone who calls himself a great hero, the knowledge of sensory objects in someone who calls himself a man of wisdom—does not all this give the lie to his words? If what Irāmaliṅka Piḷḷai's disciples say about his attainment of the experience of Śiva and his knowledge of alchemy is true, then why does he go to several people in this city of Ceṇṇapaṭṭiṇam, and falling at their feet, sorrowfully earn his livelihood several times? Why does he now praise those he previously reviled and wander around, seeking to get one or two *āṇas* for meat and alcohol? Why does he enter into business with others, then appropriate their share of the goods and, thus, fling mud into their mouths? Why does he go to prostitutes and goldsmiths and,

dissimulating, feigning devotion to Śiva, obtaining, for free, ornaments from them, takes to his heels?’ (Caravaṇaṇ 2010, 706–7)

Is this the point when we, the readers, start to feel a twinge of sympathy for Ramalinga Swamigal? When we are compelled to ask—is it such a bad thing to beg in order to feed others, to have dreams of accomplishing much and seeking to accomplish much even while struggling to do so? Can someone who seeks to feed some swindle others in order to do so—are there some inconsistencies in this portrait? Do we begin to comprehend the harsh reality of poverty that applies to him not just to others, though the poetry and prose is mainly about the others? That he only refers to his own poverty in the form of suggested evocations in the poetry and in the silences of his letters?³¹ Is there not a Don Quixote-like grandeur in the folly of (p.81) attempting to work towards what one wants to do, even while one will be made the butt of satire? This sympathy heightens when, as in the next passage of *The Refutation*, we are made privy to some information that is revelatory in terms of Ramalinga Swamigal’s biography. This is the fate of his wife.

The Wife and Other Anomalies

The hagiographies, from the beginning, remained reticent about Ramalinga Swamigal’s marriage and about what happened to his spouse. Toḷuvūr Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār does not mention her at all in any of his writings. The 1930 Balasundaram Pillai hagiography dismisses the marriage in two sentences (Balasundaram Pillai 1930, 14). ‘The Notes of Kantacāmi Piḷḷai’, our first really detailed account of biographical incidents, gives us that which has remained the standard account. It says that when Ramalinga Swamigal was still living in Chennai, he was being pressurized to marry by his relatives. Though he remained unconvinced, they finally brought a Śivayogī to convince him, who succeeded in doing so. Treating this event as something staged for the sake of worldly appearances from the beginning, Ramalinga Swamigal consented to the marriage. The girl chosen for him, as is usual in the Tamil kinship system, was his own niece, Taṇammāl. The marital night approached. Ramalinga Swamigal walked into the bedroom, carrying a copy of Māṇikkavācakar’s *Tiruvācakam*, softly reciting it. He asked his bride to bring the lamp to him and, when she remained demurely passive, he took the lamp himself and spent the whole night reciting the poetry, with tears rolling down his cheeks. After several days passed like this, Ramalinga Swamigal’s family realized the futility of their efforts and regretted having compelled him to marry (Kantacāmi Piḷḷai 1970, 9). This story is repeated, more or less verbatim, in the 1936 official hagiography of the Caṇmārkkā Caṇkam with the slight modification that his wife’s name is given as Taṇakkōṭi Ammāl (Anon 1936, 25–6). The 1953 Vasudeva Mutaliyar biography frankly alludes to the hagiographical topos that undoubtedly formed the inspiration for the standard account of the wedding night:

Danacoti Ammal daughter of Unnamalai Ammal sister of Swamigal was married to Swamigal. Swamigal spent the night in the nuptial room by reading ‘Tiruvachagam’ to his spouse till the dawn just **(p.82)** like Ramakrishna Paramahansa to Sarathamani Deviyar. Finding Swāmigal was no use to family life Danacoti Ammall [sic] lived a life of purity and devotion.³²

Ūraṇ Aṭikaḷ’s 1971 biography (Ūraṇ Aṭikaḷ 1976, 67–9) gives us the further information that the wedding took place in 1850, when Ramalinga Swamigal was already 27, an advanced age for a first marriage in those days. Ūraṇ Aṭikaḷ discreetly adds that what happened to Ramalinga Swamigal’s wife, Taṇammāl, after this is unclear and that the oral information that one gets is contradictory (Ūraṇ Aṭikaḷ 1976, 69). In other words, the earliest hagiographers may have wished to incorporate a Ramakrishna Paramahansa- and Sharada Devi-like topos into Ramalinga Swamigal’s biography, where the spouse of the saint becomes a part of the holy life herself and a mother to his disciples,³³ but they seem unable to successfully or in detail do so—there is a certain reticence and an open-ending that leaves room for speculation as to what happened to her at all. *The Refutation* will now demolish the reticence of the disciples and show their stories to be fabrications with the following account:

Approximately ten years ago, apparently, when some businessmen were talking to Irāmaliṅka Piḷḷai in Chidambaram he had moved away from them a certain distance and when they asked why he did so he had replied, ‘My wife has just died in Ceṇṇappaṭṭiṇam. I came to know of it here.’ Seeing this [incident] followed, on the third day, **(p.83)** by a letter with the news of the death, the businessmen had considered him omniscient from that day and worship him say his disciples, wandering around everywhere, praising him. Well, Well! Well done indeed! He indeed has just one wife. Till today anyone can see her, can see her—wandering around, in Ceṇṇappaṭṭiṇam and its environs, leading an immoral life, with a destitute mendicant. ... If it is true that Irāmaliṅka Piḷḷai is Śiva himself who is omniscient, and has incarnated, hiding his three eyes and his blue throat, for the welfare of people, then would he have married without knowing that his wife was this kind of person and then, afterwards, fearing ignominy, would he have fled from Ceṇṇappaṭṭiṇam? (Caravaṇaṇ 2010, 707–8)

We, the readers, may well accept the plausibility of the story in its essentials: that Ramalinga Swamigal’s wife fled him, after an unconsummated marriage, and led her life with another man. It is not too difficult to believe that Ramalinga Swamigal did not have any further contact with her and that she was dead, for all intent and purposes, as far as he was concerned. It is Navalar’s framework of the story, with its prurient and voyeuristic overtones, presented not as a common enough tale of a marriage gone wrong, but as one which is again exploited by Ramalinga Swamigal to further his own reputation as a miracle-

worker, that is disturbing. The sympathy that the reader might begin to feel for Ramalinga Swamigal is undergirded by the nature of Navalar's observations, which particularly relate to the manner in which Ramalinga Swamigal lives and goes about his work—central to this issue are his peregrinations as a wandering ascetic, a figure who presented a major threat to various emerging institutional structures and the British imperial project.

From the perspective of British administrators, wandering yogīs and sādhus in colonial India formed a dubious category of citizens, as these observations of H.A. Rose on the castes and tribes of northwest India show:

Every rascally beggar who pretends to be able to tell fortunes or to practice astrological and necromantic arts, in however small a degree, buys himself a drum and calls himself, and is called by others, a jogī. ... They are a thoroughly vagabond set, and wander about the country beating a drum and begging, practicing surgery and physic in a small way, writing charms, telling fortunes, and practicing exorcism (p.84) and divination; or sitting in the villages, eke out their earnings from these occupations.³⁴

Is not this account of the itinerant and dubious yogī very similar to the following account we have of Ramalinga Swamigal written by the Danish missionary C. Ochs in a 1871 pastoral letter written in the *Danish Missions Blad*?

At Vadalur a swindler is going around these days. He pretends to be able to raise the dead. The missionary at Pannurutti told me that in these days this man shall perform the trick which he has promised for a long time. People are coming from far-off places to see him. He is in a hurry to perform this miracle. Recently, his booty was stolen by thieves. Now he wants to make the lost money by deceiving people. ... In Pannurutti, a man who was dying is reported to have ordered his wife not to cremate his body but instead send a sum of money to the miracle-worker so that he would raise him to life when he had died.³⁵

This missionary letter breathes the same air as of Navalar's missive and foregrounds those who 'go around' conning others. In this context, it is significant how frequently Navalar speaks of peregrinations in *The Refutation*, using words such as roaming (*alai-tal*) and wandering (*tiri-tal*) in the context of speaking of Ramalinga Swamigal's life. Ramalinga himself wanders around tricking people and running away from exposure, his disciples wander around making false claims regarding him, and his wife roams around with an itinerant ascetic. In all these repetitions of wandering, we see several strands of colonial discourse and strategies of governance converging together. There is the discourse of citizenship in the Tamil country in this period that made imperative the creation of a sedentary and disciplined local population, which was part of the larger historiographical project of the creation of a 'Tamil country' between

the late eighteenth and late nineteenth centuries. This, as Irschick has shown, resulted in a new valourization of sedentary agriculture. 'This judgment separated those who practiced agriculture from groups who wandered and travelled across **(p.85)** the land in search of a livelihood, to pursue commerce, to beg, or to become saints.'³⁶ The latter were to now be regarded as both marginal and threatening to civic order. There is, secondly, and not unrelated to the above-mentioned development, the beginnings of an ideology of 'public space' that brought together colonial notions of the 'public' with jurisprudence. 'Public space', in contradistinction to older Indian notions of 'public' and 'private' or 'inside' and 'outside', was now slowly being reconstituted as that urban space which was linked to the idea of 'good governance'. It was a location of municipal order and its maintenance was closely linked to safeguarding propertied interests and the 'public good'.³⁷ This reconfiguration of colonial space meant that certain older, precolonial spaces, such as the bazaar, and those itinerants who constantly traversed them or inhabited them with ease, came to be thought of anew as transgressive and in need of control. These spatial and social configurations, linked to processes of citizen-making, inexorably lead to the creation of new subjectivities and the questioning not just of social categories, but also of religious typologies, including that of the traditional, wandering ascetic. We thus see, ironically, in this contempt for the wandering ascetic figure, Navalar's mimetic bonds with the very paternal figures and institutions he repudiated so strongly in other contexts, who constituted the religious and political 'others', such as the Christian missionaries and British administrators, of his time. This was a historical moment when the ascetic and others like him had to not just be regarded with suspicion but, in an ironic mirroring, be policed by the state through a surveillance personnel that, like them, would also haunt these very spaces.³⁸

(p.86) Further, Navalar's observations are classic rumours in that they do not follow any evidentiary process. The mode of transmission is anonymous, multiple, composed mainly of hearsay and consists of truth-claims that rely entirely on the credibility and authority of the speaker, who is Navalar himself. We are not confronted with 'harmless' gossip or hearsay—entertaining but without the intention to harm.³⁹ We are not talking about the sort of conversation, enjoyable and private, between trusted companions—a form of sociability in Bengali culture termed *adda*, which Chakrabarty (2000) speaks of. Nevertheless, there is some common cause between what fuels rumours, as we read of them in *The Refutation* and discussions about *adda*, as Chakrabarty describes it. Behind all the talk about *adda* or the loss of it, he points out, lurks, 'an unarticulated anxiety: How does one sing to the ever-changing tunes of capitalist modernity and retain a comfortable sense of being at home in it?' (Chakrabarty [2000] 2007, 182). Similarly, reading between the lines of *The Refutation's* polemical stance, innuendos, and rumours, behind information that is being circulated as a matter of public concern, we see underlying anxieties

operating with regard to religion, to Śaivism itself—to what constitutes the religious canon and the preceptors of the canon—in colonial modernity. Indeed this becomes very clear when we see how Nāvalar winds up his personal remarks on the matter and, thus, for all intents and purposes, concludes *The Refutation*.⁴⁰

(p.87) Everybody should read this work with a quiet mind and [according to the words of the *Tirukkural* about examining the truth of any matter] understanding the truth, abandoning worldly utterances, should take up only those true works that are divine utterances, such as the *Tēvāram* etc., in accordance with prescription, and recite them with faith and commitment. (Caravaṇaṇ 2010, 709)

Thus, ultimately, the attack, Nāvalar makes clear, is less about Ramalinga Swamigal himself than about the need to school a new kind of Śaiva public: in educating it to understand what constitutes the canon and who must be considered to speak for it.

The locally situated nature of Ramalinga Swamigal's influence and popularity, the immense success that the songs of the *Tiruvaruṭpā* enjoyed among people, a success Nāvalar himself is forced to admit and speaks of repeatedly in *The Refutation*, was a nuisance if not a threat to such a regulation and regimentation of Tamil Śaivism. This popularity could only be curbed by polemics, and the nineteenth century was particularly conducive to the growth of polemical discussions due to the opportunities offered by print.

Print and Polemics in Colonial Tamil Nadu

The polemical refutation of the theology of one's opponents as the *prima facie* position (*parapakkaṁ* [*pūrvapakṣa*]) followed by the establishment of one's own views (*cuvapakkaṁ* [*svapakṣa/siddhanta*]) has a long history in both Sanskrit and Tamil premodern religious commentarial literature, and the classic commentaries on the Vedāntasūtras of Śaṅkara, Rāmanuja, and Madhva all contain sections of this kind. At the same time, there were individual works that were devoted to a refutation of the opponents' position alone, and, frequently, the pan-Indian reputation of a polymathic scholar was established on the basis of his reputation for composing such works. Thus, the fourteenth-century Śrīvaiṣṇava theologian, Vedānta Deśika, was conferred the title 'Lion among Poets and Logicians' (*kavi-tārṅkika-siṃha*) for works such as *The Refutation of the Doctrines of Others* (*Paramatabhaṅgam*) and *The Six Types of Censure* (*Ṣatadūṣaṇī*), both of which attacked, among others, the Kevalādvaita of the school of Śaṅkara. In fact, the latter work is considered by the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition to be a reply of sorts to another polemical attack by the advaitin **(p.88)** Kṛṣṇa Miśra on Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta. Taking a stance and meeting one polemical attack by another, therefore, was common practice in medieval Sanskrit commentarial literature. Often refutation and assertion was also seen

as the most effective mode of clarifying one's own theological position in the best way, working out subtleties of differences, from that of others. Thus, the fourteenth-century Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta work of Umāpati Śaivācārya, the *Śivajñānasiddhiyār*, is considered the definitive work precisely because it follows this format in delineating the specific advaitic position of the Siddhānta as opposed to Kevalādvaita. The genre of polemical literature collectively known as *khaṇḍanas* as well has a long history in both Sanskrit and Tamil literature and this genre, too, has undergone changes over time. A significant shift, as McCrea has shown, already for the sixteenth century in the works of the Dvaita theologian Vyāsatīrtha, was the move from an attack on a generic and de-historicized theological opponent to a specific historical engagement with the views of his contemporaries.⁴¹ Bronner and Tubb (2008)⁴² also suggest that on the eve of colonialism in the seventeenth century, a new critical attitude towards the near past combined with a reverence towards the distant past led to a re-fashioning of the *khaṇḍana* as a much harsher form of critique of living authors, incorporating very precisely specific quotations from their work.⁴³ To condemn works such as these as *ad hominem*, nit-picking attacks would be to misunderstand their import since they 'pursued innovative ways of grappling with the fundamental issues of the tradition and with the serious tensions that had grown up around them' (Bronner and Tubb 2008, 75). This certainly is what we also see in the *Aruṭpā-Maruṭpā* controversy and, particularly, in *The Refutation*.

Nevertheless, polemical positions long rehearsed and anticipated, through centuries of inter-textuality, had to re-thought and crafted anew with the decisive emergence of Christianity—both Jesuitical and Evangelical—in the Tamil literary scene, both in Jaffna and **(p.89)** southern India, starting from the seventeenth century.⁴⁴ After the mid-nineteenth century, much of these polemics, among the traditional elites, was conducted in the new medium of printed books.⁴⁵ There was, in general, an increased literary competitiveness in the air as those—other than the traditional, religious establishment—who formed a category of self-invented, new, and 'lay' religious leaders such as Ramalinga Swamikal began to give voice to their views in print, thus provoking the critical response of the former.⁴⁶ It has, therefore, been suggested that the mid-nineteenth-century literary landscape saw a surge in the production of polemical refutations of newly edited and published literary works.⁴⁷ This picture is confirmed not just for the pan-Indian scene but also for South Asia in general for the late nineteenth century. Print, particularly in a mobile and urbanizing society, provided a means to reach across to and constitute new reading publics at the same time that a shift was taking place **(p.90)** from traditional modes of education. A system of learning involving intense one-to-one apprenticeship, literary and religious, between teacher and pupil was giving way to more formalized and institutionalized modes of education.⁴⁸ As Mitchell remarks, 'Attitudes towards language, definitions of accuracy and error, the functions of

orality and memory, the meaning of truth and fiction, and the very role of “meaning” itself all underwent revolutionary changes in nineteenth-century southern India in conjunction with the introduction of printing’ (Mitchell 2009, 131). The picture for the Tamil region in the colonial period is substantiated when one looks at catalogues of Tamil printed books for the nineteenth century, such as those in the British Museum collection. One sees that, among the books most frequently printed and disseminated, polemical tracts that related to Hindu-Christian polemics are as plentiful as those that pursued older sectarian rivalries between the Śaivas and Vaiṣṇavas, on the one hand, and the Teṅkalai and Vaṭakalai Śrīvaiṣṇavas, on the other.⁴⁹ This was not a period when objectively marshalled and calm arguments set the tenor of the engagement. Instead, we find the polemical thrust aimed at the personal, with an emphasis on the scandalous, as in Navalar’s tract, where Navalar might, in addition, also have been drawing on an older Śaivite tradition of ‘othering’ opponents who one refused to take seriously doctrinally through a denigration of their physical appearance and habits.⁵⁰

At stake was not simply the critical reception of the work of one scholar by another, more established one, but rather the very nature of what constitutes Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta at a particular historical **(p.91)** moment, at a time of colonial modernity. There were several dimensions to this project, in all of which Navalar played a significant role in his time. The first was to construct a modern literary canon that was both authentically Tamil and authentically Śaivite.⁵¹ Navalar foregrounded this project through his own literary activities. Equally importantly, it was necessary to reform Śaiva ritual behaviour—that is, worship at the temples. Navalar, his entire life, passionately espoused a purified form of Śaiva worship. Knowledge of such worship was to be derived and reconstructed anew through textual studies of the Śaiva āgamas. Such worship, in fact, bore little resemblance to actual ritual practices in Śaiva temples, grounded as they were on a fine balance between textual, regional, and local tradition and authorized by custom and usage. Navalar’s views thus brought him into unceasing conflict with the priests of temples both in Jaffna and southern India.⁵² Finally, Navalar appears to have aimed at what might be called a deliberate ‘Protestantization’ of Śaivism in the sense of the creation of an informed lay Śaiva public (Ambalavanar 2006) that would also regulate Śaiva religion and function as arbiters of what was authentically Śaivite (Ambalavanar 2006). It is significant what the creation of such a public meant. For, it lay down new lines of ‘inclusion’ and ‘exclusion’ with foundations in a narrowly defined religious authority and textual community. Generally, what was being pushed through here, as in a great deal of elite religious reform happening in the nineteenth century, were ‘high cultural, normative standards’ that veered decisively away from the local towards greater centralization and standardization.⁵³ Ultimately, it was what was authentically Śaivite and what constituted the canon, narrowly and newly re-cast as ‘tradition’, and what was

not that brought Navalar into conflict with Ramalinga Swamigal. For, in his polemical assault on Ramalinga Swamigal, *The Refutation*, Navalar argued that, in naming Ramalinga's work as *Tiruvaruṭpā* both he and his followers were elevating his work to the same status as (p.92) the Śaiva *Tirumurai*. Thus, outrageously, they were making a claim for Ramalinga, this trickster, this oddly enough poverty-stricken yet self-proclaimed alchemist, as someone on par with the poet-saints of the canon, the nāyaṇmār, and for the open-ended nature of the canon itself.⁵⁴

For much of the controversy, the heads of the important Śaiva maṭhas in southern India appear to have been in solidarity with Navalar. Navalar, as we know, came from the same community of Śaiva Vēḷḷālas from which the religious heads were drawn: these were the Kārkāttappiḷḷai sub-caste, which has the highest caste ranking among the *piḷḷaimārs*, the other two sub-categories being the Cōḷiyappiḷḷai and the Karuṇīkars. In this grouping, Ramalinga, a Karuṇīkar, came from the least prestigious group, destined never to be heads of Śaiva maṭhas.⁵⁵ Thus, the maṭha heads' support for Navalar might be seen as evidence for caste solidarity at work. Even while this must not be overlooked, it need not necessarily have been the predominant reason why the religious heads would instinctively support Navalar against Ramalinga Swamigal on the matter of the *Tiruvaruṭpa*. Both caste feelings and religious sensibilities would be united: as guardians of the Śaiva Siddhānta tradition, they would have been incredulous at the claims made for Ramalinga's writings. It is not likely that these very same religious heads would have been fully comfortable with Navalar's decidedly new and revivalist views on Śaivism but in this instance there would have been a meeting of minds: there could be no place for Ramalinga Swamigal after 1867 within this network of Śaiva orthodoxy and this recast Śaivism.

(p.93) Equally important in the controversy perhaps was the role that the emergence of copyright in this period meant for notions of authorship. Venkatachalapathy has pointed out that Act XX of 1847 provided damages for the infringement of copyright, and we know from the title page of the first edition of the *Tiruvaruṭpā* that there was a claim to having registered the work under the copyright act (Venkatachalapathy 2012, 184–7). At the same time, there was much confusion as to what 'copyright' meant—the early Tamil printing presses seemed not yet to have grasped the fact that this referred to some kind of official imprimatur. Rather, they saw it as part of the typesetting design of the title page of a printed book and thus incorporated the words 'copyright registered' without the sanction that it implied. In other words, the introduction of the law into the realm of literature in nineteenth-century India led to a period of confused transition, not unlike the similar situation in eighteenth-century England. It led to the creation of a literary marketplace and new forms of patronage. Navalar with his own printing and publishing activities must have been well aware of the implications of copyright for authorship. Indeed it has been pointed out that the very modern idea of the author as the individual who

has ownership rights over the text he or she composes emerges in conjunction with copyright.⁵⁶ More significantly, as Susan Stewart has pointed out, when we ‘consider the relationship between authority and writing practices’ we begin to grasp that the concept of authorial originality or authenticity itself is a concept emergent only with the ‘advent of mechanical modes of literary production’ (Stewart 1991 9). In the light of this, Navalar’s response to Ramalinga Swamigal’s poetry must be seen from yet another perspective: his insistence on hyper-literalism, on seeing the references to miracles in the poetic work as truth statements of a very literal sort made by Ramalinga, is also part of the insistence that the poet-saint, so to speak, stand by his work, since he has ownership, is the author, of it. In other words, Ramalinga Swamigal is to be held accountable in new ways for his poetry. This hyper-literalism is a strategic refusal to recognize that the poetry is embedded within a long tradition of devotional Śaivite **(p.94)** poetry that employs the same tropes that Ramalinga Swamigal does and, therefore, that one might need to speak of the conventions of a poetic persona, ‘the ideogram of the author’ (Hawley 1988), rather than the person of the poet himself when engaging with the poetry. Here, one would have to adopt the notions that Navalar would have been all too familiar with, whereby the poet is a ‘site of attribution’ as understood by premodern hagiographical conventions and not a unitary, modern, authorial self. Navalar’s hyper-literalism hinges upon implicit notions of poetic authenticity that dismantle the free-flowing relationship between orality, memory, and writing, a relationship reconfigured by the age of printing. Print also becomes a means to reflect upon and reconfigure elite discourse, here Śaiva Siddhāntic discourse, in another register. It is this attitude that underlies the accusations regarding grammatical solecisms, which are in reality also the solecisms of religious and caste identity that Ramalinga is seen to be guilty of. Indeed, it might also be not too speculative in this context to see, in Navalar’s implicit caste condescension towards Ramalinga, the early stages in the process of the reorienting of caste discourse in modernity, where it is elided into a purely cultural and communitarian identity construct, aiming at preserving cultural differences in the private sphere.⁵⁷ There is no doubt that all these new and novel intersections between elite punditry, polemics, caste, and printing contributed significantly to and sustained the Ramalinga Swamigal–Arumuga Navalar or, more popularly, the *Aruṭpā–Maruṭpā* controversy, as it came to be known over many decades, making it a signature literary event of Tamil modernity.

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Notes:

(¹) This chapter has benefited greatly from exchanges with the participants in the conference 'Modernity, Diversity and the Public Sphere: Negotiating Identities in 18th–20th Century India', organized by Vasudha Dalmia and Martin Fuchs at Erfurt, Germany, between 23 and 25 September 2010, to which I was graciously invited, and the subsequent insightful comments of both Martin Fuchs and Vasudha Dalmia on the article that evolved for the conference volume. For their rich input into the making of this chapter, I also wish to thank Ramya Sreenivasan, Lisa Mitchell, and Deven Patel at the University of Pennsylvania, USA. For further insightful critique, I am much indebted to Anne

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(²) Tamil popular personal and city names have been reproduced in their popular English spelling. Less well-known Tamil words, the titles of texts, and citations from them are given in their Tamil transliteration, following the system of the *Madras Tamil Lexicon*. Religious terminology which is of Sanskrit origin is given in its *maṇipravāḷa* form, in a mixture of the transliteration scheme employed for both Sanskrit and Tamil.

(³) I take this concept from Metcalf (1992, 232), where, in speaking of the new sources of religious authority in colonial India, she writes:

Ever more important in claiming the moral leadership of the communities were a new category of leaders who one may call ‘lay’ leaders. ... Although they became experts in the religious tradition, these people did not receive traditional teaching or initiation like the religious elites, the ‘ulamā and pandits, who were heirs of the historically transmitted traditional learning. ... The successful were able to support themselves simply by their writing and preaching activities. Sometimes teachers and translators seemed to play a significant role as people especially well prepared for interpreting and translating across and within the body of learning. They redefined the basis of religious authority.

(⁴) For an understanding of the anti-hagiography as a genre form, which uses hagiographical topoi to construct an archetype of a life the opposite of saintly, see Tolan (1996).

(⁵) On the early hagiographical narratives concerning the disappearance of Ramalinga Swamigal and for a summary of his biography, see Raman (2004, 2013). On the hagiographies and biographies of Ramalinga Swamigal written between the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, which contributed to a re-thinking of Tamil Śaivism, see my forthcoming monograph: ‘The Transformation of Tamil Religion. Ramalinga Swamigal (1823–1874) and Modern, Dravidian Sainthood’ (forthcoming, Routledge).

(⁶) For excellent English-language studies of Navalār’s biography as well as his contribution to the re-imagining of Śaivism in the colonial period, see Hudson (1992a, 1992b, 1994) and Ambalavanar (2006). This section on Navalār relies, by and large, on these studies.

(⁷) This section relies on Caravaṇaṇ’s (2000, 2010) extraordinary archival research over several decades that resulted in a publication of the texts of this dispute in 2010. As Caravaṇaṇ (2010, 50) has pointed out, several of the texts are no longer available, having suffered the general fate of manuscripts, both paper and palm-leaf, in Tamil Nadu. Thus, his collation of the remaining texts

and their printing has enabled us to retrieve a significant chapter in Tamil literary and religious history before more of it crumbles to dust.

(⁸) For earlier detailed analyses of this tract, see Hudson (1994) and Young and Jebanesan (1995).

(⁹) For a study of Arumuga Navalar as orator, his debt to Christian sermonizing, and the role of oratorical and linguistic practices in constructing both a new Tamil and a new religion, see Bate (2005).

(¹⁰) In his addendum to this comment, Katiravēl Piḷḷai, Navalar's disciple, is anxious to include not just these five works but the remaining seven works considered to comprise the twelve *Tirumuṟai* in all, to form part of this sacred core of the Śaiva Siddhānta corpus (Caravanāṇ 2010, 697). For the most part of this analysis, I do not take into consideration Katirvēl Piḷḷai's additional comments on the original text, unless I specifically state that I do.

(¹¹) The four meant here are the authors of the *Tēvāram*—Appar, Cuntarar and Tiruñāṇacampantar, and Māṇikkavācakar.

(¹²) ... mērkūriya nāyaṇmārkaḷ pacukaraṇa nīṅkic civakaraṇam peṟṟavarkaḷ eṇṇpatu teḷivuṟa nāṭṭappaṭum. ātalāl, innāyaṇmārkaḷ aruḷicceyta tēvāra mutaliya aiyntum ... pativākenṟē teḷittuṇarappaṭum; pacuvākenṟu nuṇaikkiṇum atu piṟavit tuṇpatukkum narakat tuṇpatukkum vittākum.

(It is clearly established that the Nāyaṇmārkaḷ mentioned above are those whose human sensory instruments have ceased and who have obtained divine sensory instruments. Therefore, the five texts including the *Tēvāram* that they taught ... are clearly established as the words of the Lord himself. To regard them as those of a human would lead to suffering in this life and hell in the afterlife.)

(¹³) On the Kailāśa *paramparai*, see Nambi (1984) and Koppedrayer (1990, 137–8). Considered the lineage of preceptors who undergird the religious authority of the orthodox Śaiva institutions of Tiruvāṇṭūṟai and Dharmapuram and the other institutions that accept their authority the Kailāśa *paramparai* begins with Śiva as Śrīkaṇṭhaparameśvara as its head, followed by Nandideva, Sanatkumāra, Satyañānadarśi, and Parañjyoti as its divine authorities, followed by the human authorities of the first *ācāryas* of the *śāstras*, Meykaṇṭār, Aruḷṇāṭticivācāriyār, Maṟaiñāṇacampantar, and Umāpati. The eight thus listed divide up into two categories, with the first four called the *akaccantāṇam*, symbolically 'inside' the tradition yet not of this world but residing in Mount Kailāśa, and the remaining 4 the *puṟaccantāṇam*, those who are 'outside' in this world. According to tradition, Meykaṇṭār and Aruḷṇāṭti lived just prior to Umāpati, whereas Maṟaiñāṇacampantar was Umāpati's living guru. The abode of all these mortal gurus was Chidambaram and tradition associates Maṟaiñāṇacampantar and

Umāpati with maṭhas established in the Chidambaram area around the fifteenth century.

(¹⁴) Ivarkaḷ tiruvākku aruṭpāv eṇṇatum, vētatṭiṇum pārka ivaikaḷiṇṇāṇē civappirāṇukku atika pirītiyuḷḷatu eṇṇatum, civapirāṇ umātēviyārukkuk kūriṇāreṇac civarakaciyattir kūriya kirantakaḷiṇṇār uṇarappaṭum.

(This is known from the scriptures of the Śivarahasya where Śiva says to Umā Devi that their sayings are divine sayings and that he, Śiva, loves these much more than the Vedas.)

(¹⁵) On this Śaivite interpretation of Caṅkam literature and its canonicity in commentaries on medieval (eleventh–thirteenth centuries) Tamil grammars, see Clare (2011). Clare shows that what constituted the Tamil literary canon in premodern texts was constantly being negotiated in the light of differing cultural projects, historical contexts, and readership. For the origins of Tamil from the God Subrahmaṇya, the Tamil Murukaṇ, who gives it to Agastya, see the discussion, for example, in the ‘Introduction’ of Aruṇācalam Catācivam Piḷḷai alias J.R. Arnold’s *Pāvalar Carittira Dīpakam or the Galaxy of Tamil Poets*, which came out in 1886.

(¹⁶) The story of Aruṇakirinātar is paradigmatic in this regard. Long in circulation as oral tradition and put together as late as the late nineteenth—early twentieth century, along with printed,—partial editions of his works, the story came to be standardized in Taṇṭapāṇi Cuvāmikaḷ’s *Pulavar Purāṇam*, *Aruṇakirinātar Cuvāmikaḷ Carukkam*. The story goes that the poet, having long led a dissolute life, becomes suicidal and decides to throw himself from the temple tower (*gopuram*) of the Aruṇācaleśvara temple in Tiruvaṇṇāmalai. Murukaṇ appears and saves him and also gives him the gift of song, after which the poet travels through the Tamil landscape sacred to Murukaṇ, singing his praise. Finally, he reaches the temple of Tiruttaṇi where he transforms into a parrot and unites with the god there. For details of the biography see, further, Mu. Aruṇācalam, *Tamiḷ Ilakkiya Varalāru, Patinaṇṭām Nūṇṇāṇṭu* (2010, 2–10) and Zvelebil (1995, 71–3).

(¹⁷) On śivānubhūti/śivānubhava as the final stage of liberation in Śaiva Siddhānta, see Sivaraman (2001, 405–18).

(¹⁸) Fascimile of the title page of the first edition: tiruvaruṭpirakāca vaḷḷalāreṇṇum citamparam irāmaliṇka piḷḷai tiruvāymalarntaruḷiya tiruvaruṭpā (The Tiruvaruṭpā taught by Citamparam Irāmaliṇka Piḷḷai known as Tiruvaruṭpirakāca Vaḷḷalār).

(¹⁹) On the significance of localizing the deity and the distinctive form of Śiva in each of the sacred places sung about by the nāyaṇmār, see Peterson (1989) and Pechilis Prentiss (1999).

(²⁰) On Navalar's critique of contemporary temple worship and his ongoing battles with both the priests of the Nallūr Kantacāmi Kōyil and the priests (*dīksīṭars*) of the Chidambaram temple, see Hudson (1992a) and Ambalavanar (2006, 377–86).

(²¹) On the use of this motif in the *Tirumuṟai* and the post-*Tirumuṟai* Śaivite literature, see Raman (2017).

(²²) All quotations from the *Tiruvārūṭpā* are from the Ūraṇ Aṭikaḷ edition of 1972 and the transliteration follows the *sandhi* conventions of his text.

4th *Tirumuṟai*, 15.2775:

nātāpoṇ ambalattē aṟivāṇanta nāṭakañcey
pātā turumpiṇum paṟṟāta eṇṇaip paṇikoṇṭellām
ōtā tuṇara uṇarttiul lēniṇṟuḷavu coṇṇa
nītā niṇaimaṇ tenṇiṇaik kēṇinta nīṇilattē.'

(Oh Lord! Oh divine feet that dance the intelligent, blissful dance in the golden space.

subordinating me who am less than an insignificant thing,
making me know without learning,
standing within me and speaking thus,
It was you.

Forgetting you, what else could I think of in this wide world?)

(²³)

Ūraṇ Aṭikaḷ (1976, 604), *tiruvārūṭpā* varalāṟu, vs 21:

mītāṇat tuyarpallī mēvanamai vaikkumeṇkaḷ
mētāvaip paḷḷiviḷain taruḷiṟṟēṇ ṟuraippatevaṇ
ōtāmē emaiellām uṇarttumuru veḷiyaiaccō
ōtāmē uṇarntatenpār uṇarkilār oruviyappō.'

(Who is he, who comes near to me
—Our supremely intelligent One—
who am abiding still in a leftover sorrow?
That Vision
who, not teaching, makes us all know.
They who cannot fathom say
it was experienced without learning.
A Wonder it is.)

(²⁴) Caravaṇaṇ (2010, 700).

(²⁵) As Venkatachalapathy writes (2010, 28–31), the landmark project of bringing out a Caṅkam classic, the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*, by U.Vē. Cāmiṇātaiyar in 1887 might have taken on mythical hues in retrospect but was a project fraught with danger at the time of its undertaking. The edition was received with as much censure as praise, and criticized roundly in a series of polemical tracts

that were refuted by U.Vē. Cāmiṇātaiyar's admirers. Indeed print brought to the fore the issue of the variability of manuscript traditions, recasting this variability or non-standardization as 'error'. On this, see further Mitchell (2009, 144–6).

(²⁶) *Tiruvārūṭpā*, 4th *Tirumurai*.41.3028.

(²⁷) The story of Namināṇṭi Aṭikaḷ lighting the lamps at the temple in Tiruvārūr with water instead of oil, at the behest of some skeptical Jainas, is told in *Periyapurāṇam*, verses 1866–1897.

(²⁸) Here, Navalār cites *Tiruvārūṭpā*, 4th *Tirumurai*. 277.

(²⁹) An exception is the recent, unpublished dissertation of Fiordalis (2008) that I refer to in this section as well as the edited volume of Dempsey and Selva J. Raj (2008). In contrast, we have some outstanding work by medievalists on the role of miracles in medieval Christianity. The work of Brown (1998) on elite practices worked into popular religion in the cult of saints, that of Ward (1982) on a variety of genres of medieval literature, including theological works that deal with miracles and their typologies, Bynum's (1997) on 'wonder' and miracles, and, most recently, Yarrow (2006) on the miracle stories of twelfth-century England have all contributed greatly to our understanding of medieval, Christian miracle literatures.

(³⁰) The lives of the *samayācāryas* in the *Periyapurāṇam* are replete with miracles that relate to conversion. A famous one is the conversion of the Pāṇṭiyaṇ king of Madurai from Jainism to Śaivism by curing him of fever in *Periyapurāṇam*, verses 2600–2668. On miracles and conversion in the *Śrīvaiṣṇava* literature, see Raman (2007).

(³¹) The letters of Ramalinga Swamigal, particularly those written to Irukkam Irattīṇa Mutaliyār, the man most responsible for convincing him to allow the poetry to be published, were written between 1858 and 1869. These letters, numbering 37 in all, also allow us a glimpse into the man in relation to his intimates, ungoverned by poetic conventions. Certain of the letters (such as Letters 6, 15, 16, and 33) hint at requests for money, the promise to repay the sums, as well as expressions of his poverty. See A. Pālakiruṣṇa Piḷḷai, *Tirumukap Pakuti* (1959).

(³²) Vasudeva Mutaliyār (1953, 18–19). The standard hagiography of Ramakrishna called, for short, the *Kathāmṛta* gives an account of how Ramakrishna treated the eight months of sharing a room with his wife as a trial where he took on the role of a female servant to his sixteen-year-old wife and worshipped her instead of consummating the relationship. For a brief account of this event, see Kripal (1998, 134–5).

(³³) For similar motifs in the life of other religious figures, see Manring (2005, 193–219) on the wife of Advaita Ācārya, Sītā Devī, and Peter Heehs (2008) for ‘The Mother’ as the spiritual partner of Aurobindo and the leader of the community after his death. More pertinently, the variant and more frequent motif in the hagiographies of Ramalinga regarding the reluctant marriage and the irrelevant wife may also have been influenced by the identical topos in the life of Tāyumāṇavar, the seventeenth-century Śaivite poet whom Ramalinga is deeply influenced by and with whom he is frequently compared.

(³⁴) H.A. Rose’s observations, based on the Punjab census reports of 1883 and 1892, quoted in White [2009] 2011, 240. The problem that British authorities had in containing itinerant yogis and warrior ascetics in colonial India is well demonstrated in Pinch (2006).

(³⁵) Quoted in Francis (1990, 15–16).

(³⁶) On this see Irschick (1994, 191ff.).

(³⁷) See Glover (2007) on this. For further studies of this colonial construction of ‘public space’ in South Asia and its exclusionary consequences, see the ‘Bibliography’ in Glover (2007) and footnote 4.

(³⁸) It would be a mistake to assume that the liminality of the ascetic and the anxiety regarding his/her peregrinations was an entirely modern, colonial development. Classical treatises on Indian polity, such as the *Arthaśāstra* (150 BCE–300 CE), not only voice similar concerns but also recommend that the king put this wandering to pragmatic use, with the ascetic as a spy, or, more precisely, have agents disguised as ascetics in order to conduct a secret surveillance of the kingdom. See, for example, *Arthśāstra*, 4.4–4.5. The difference lies in the kinds of discourse this anxiety generates, requiring specific historical contextualization.

(³⁹) The grave consequences of rumours and gossip and how they can ruin reputations and families has been explored in other genres of Tamil literature in the late nineteenth century. The most famous example is the 1896 publication in book form of one of the earliest Tamil novels written by Pi.Ār. Rājam Aiyar titled *The Fatal Rumour or the History of Kamalāmbāl* (*Āpatukkiṭamāṭa Apavātam Allatu Kamalāmpāl Carittiram*). For an excellent translation with introduction, see Blackburn (1998). For a further analysis, see Ebeling (2010, 232–44).

(⁴⁰) The very last section of *The Refutations* is like an addendum, consisting of Navalar’s printing of a letter written in December–January 1868 by one Vīrācāmi Piḷḷai to Navalar, regarding an exchange that took place between Toḷuvūr Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār and other disciples of Ramalinga, on the one hand, and Irāmacāmi Piḷḷai of the orthodox Śaiva maṭhas. This letter, which reveals the orthodox displeasure with the *Tiruvaruṭpā*, and portrays Ramalinga Swamigal’s

disciples as apologetic with regard to the controversy, is given by Navalar as a further evidence for his case. See Caravaṇaṇ (2010, 710–13).

(⁴¹) McCrea (forthcoming).

(⁴²) They are speaking of the *Citramīmāṃsākhaṇḍana* of Jagannātha attacking Appaya Dīkṣita's work on poetics, the *Citramīmāṃsā*.

(⁴³) See also Minkowski (2010) on the vituperative texts occasioned by sectarian disputes in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Benares.

(⁴⁴) On the polemical tracts against local religion composed by Roberto de Nobili in the seventeenth century and the refutation of them by Civapirakāca Cuvāmikaḷ as well as the eighteenth-century polemical wars between the Lutherans and the Jesuits, see Venkatachalapathy's introduction to Caravaṇaṇ (2010, 19–21).

(⁴⁵) The history of printing in nineteenth-century Madras can be divided into two phases in Stuart Blackburn's nuanced 2003 study, with the dividing period, the 1840s. Prior to then, printing was the monopoly of the British and centred at the College of Fort St George, founded in 1812. This institution linked government patronage of Tamil literature with the sponsorship of Tamil pandits in the service of publishing. After the 1830s, the situation changed with the development of commercial printing in Madras and the production, by a new category of pandit-publishers, of Tamil literature for a Tamil readership. As Blackburn (2003, 183) sees it, the 1840s are a watershed because it is then that the native publishing houses also become involved in local politics, lending their resources to the anti-missionary campaign: 'By mid-century the use of print to inform the public had assumed a new political thrust, and the fear of cultural loss through anglicisation and Christianity had turned Indian publishers into political organisations.'

(⁴⁶) For the harshness and polemical nature of religious debates on a pan-Indian scale in the nineteenth century, see Jones (1992).

(⁴⁷) See Caravaṇaṇ (2000, 11) and Venkatachalapathy's introduction to Caravaṇaṇ (2010).

(⁴⁸) For an angry denunciation of these new modes of education when compared with the old teacher-disciple form of the acquisition of knowledge, see the introductory chapter of Capāpati Nāvalar's *The Dravidian Illumination (Trāṇvita Prakācikai)*.

(⁴⁹) In the catalogue of Tamil books in the British Museum first published in 1909, we see close to 50 polemical works listed, the single largest category alongside biographies and autobiographies.

(⁵⁰) Here one is particularly thinking of the Śaivite invective against the Jains, both in the *Tirumuṟai* and beyond, focussing on their physical appearance and disgusting habits rather than doctrine. On this, see Peterson (1998). I am grateful to Anne Monius for pointing out this historical connection between older Śaiva polemics and Navalar's polemic against Ramalinga.

(⁵¹) On canonization and modern Tamil literary histories with regard to the Śaivites, see Sivathamby (1986), Blackburn (2000), and Venkatachalapathy (2005). On the Vaiṣṇavites, see Raman (2011) and on the Jains, Emmrich (2011).

(⁵²) On this, see Ambalavanar (2006) and Hudson (1992a, 37).

(⁵³) On this, see Metcalf (1992, 235).

(⁵⁴) See Caravaṇaṇ (2010, 706) for the relevant passages of *pōliyaruṭpā maruppu*.

(⁵⁵)

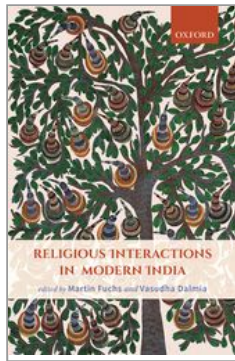
The *ādīnakartas*, who are the institutional heads of all the *maṭhas*, all follow the footsteps *piṇṇaṇi* of the high castes. All the Śaiva *maṭhas* have been in the control of one particular caste. Where other castes are concerned, however much they may have studied the Śaiva *āgamas* and be learned, they cannot become the *ādīnakartas* of the Śaiva *maṭhas*. All the *maṭhas* are in thrall to the castism of vaidika religion. It is well-known that, to become the *paṇṭāra canniti* of *maṭhas* such as Tarumapuram, Tiruvāvaṭuturai, Tiruppaṇantal etc., one should be qualified according to caste and that this fact is lauded without *piralcci* [change].

Thus Civatampi (1994, 146) quoted in Caravaṇaṇ (2000, 88, my translation).

(⁵⁶) re. Bennett (2005) on the distance between modern and premodern notions of authorship.

(⁵⁷) On this reconfiguration of caste under capitalist modernity, see Natrajan (2012).

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Jain Identity and the Public Sphere in Nineteenth-Century India

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Abstract and Keywords

The author focuses on the creation of a new sense of religious identity across Indian religions over the nineteenth century, analysing in particular the process in which a pan-Indian concept of being 'Jain' developed. The chapter discusses two conflictual cases that turned around whether or not it is proper for Jains to worship icons of the Jinās. The cases involved *Dhūṇḍhiyā* or *Sthānakvāsī* and *Mūrtipūjak* Jains, critiques and proponents of icon worship, and, in the case of the second dispute, also the founder of the *Arya Samaj*, Dayanand Saraswati. Whereas in the 1820s, identity was primarily defined by caste, sixty years later the common identity was that of shared religious belonging. Demonstrating the role of the new public sphere, the author argues that two colonialism-driven projects came together here, the introduction of the British legal system, and the introduction of new technologies of travel, communication, and dissemination of information.

Keywords: religious identity, Jain, Jinās, *Dhūṇḍhiyā*, *Sthānakvāsī*, *Mūrtipūjak* Jains, *Arya Samaj*, Dayanand Saraswati, new public sphere, British legal system

In this chapter, I look at two nineteenth-century Jain disputes to show how these processes of globalization and modernity (or, better, globalizations and modernities) combined to generate a new pan-Indian concept of being 'Jain'. I argue that Jains responded to two overlapping processes of modernity, brought to India by British colonialism, in ways that resulted in new self-understandings of what it meant to be Jain, and therefore to be members of a religion called 'Jainism'. One of these was the gradual expansion of the British **(p.100)** legal

system and the concepts of English law,¹ which introduced new concepts of the rights-bearing 'individual', and of the communities to which such individuals belonged. The other was an intertwined set of new technologies of travel, communication, and dissemination of information that linked hitherto widely dispersed and regionally heterogeneous groups of Jains into a single pan-Indian community.

In recent decades, scholars have looked at how new colonial processes of governmentality² such as the legal courts and the census operated with the assumption that 'caste' and 'religion' were fundamental, and even primordial, categories of Indian society, and as a result reified them and thereby created new senses of community identity.³ Less well studied, however, are the ways that the colonial legal processes also introduced new rules of evidence and proof, and so contributed to a new sense of the person as a rights-bearing individual rather than solely as an inextricable member of a larger group. **(p.101)** By this understanding, membership in a community was the result of a conscious choice, and not only due to the accident of birth.⁴

The new legal frameworks, however, did not operate in isolation, and it is doubtful that the courts and the law alone would have resulted in the new senses of religion and religious identity that emerged over the nineteenth century. Technological changes brought to India by the colonial powers were also affecting the ways Indians understood and identified themselves. New technologies of travel and communication resulted in the conjoined shrinking of time and expansion of space. As communication via the post, and travel via the railroad, drastically shrank the time it took to link people as far apart as Bengal, the Punjab, Gujarat, and Bombay, the time it took to communicate or travel long distances shrank, and correspondingly the space from which participants could interact with each other greatly expanded. This new sense of belonging to a single 'imagined' community (Anderson 2006), rather than what hitherto had been a far-flung set of communities that were historically related but often socially quite distinct and even ignorant of each other, combined with the legal changes to create new senses of religious identity as 'Hindu', 'Muslim', and 'Jain'. We thus see two simultaneous processes operating together to create a new understanding of 'religious communities' made up of 'individuals'.

In the early nineteenth century, a dispute between two groups of Jains over icons culminated in a series of court cases in the newly colonized city of Ahmedabad in 1820–3. These cases allow us to see how quickly sectarian partisans adopted the mechanisms of the new colonial governmentality to disputes of much longer standing, but with results that were not anticipated. The second set of disputes in the 1880s, which continued into the early twentieth century, were in part in direct continuity with the 1820–3 court cases concerning icons, but also expanded as both sides of the Jain dispute also engaged in extensive arguments with the new Ārya Samāj. This second round of **(p.102)** disputes was fought not

only through traditional public debates, but also the new technologies of letters and printed books and tracts. One centre of these disputes was Gujarat, but a more important centre was the Punjab, as the new technologies allowed for communities to participate in sectarian quarrels over a greatly expanded space. These disputes spread to the newly dominant metropole of western India, Bombay, where the two sides of one phase of the debate hired British solicitors to advance their causes. They further involved participants from Banaras, Murshidabad, and even Germany. In the 1820s, the disputants, who were perceived by the courts to be part of the same community, belonged to contiguous groups that had interacted on matters of commerce, dining, marriage, and ritual for centuries. In the 1880s, the disputants were part of a new pan-Indian imagined community of 'Jains', the basis of whose shared community was a 'religion' called 'Jainism', regardless of whether or not they belonged to groups that interacted or even knew directly of each other.

The means by which the disputes were waged, the public spheres⁵ within which they were waged, and the geographic spread of the participants all changed. We thus see a significant change in the sense of identity during this period, as encompassing simultaneously a new understanding of the legal 'individual' and a new understanding of belonging to a pan-Indian 'religion'. These were part of a broader global process by which conceptions and practices of the person and of religion that have been at the heart of the project of modernity were brought to India through colonialism.

Jains and Public Spheres in Precolonial South Asia

A major factor in the survival of the Jains as a religious and social community in India has been their success in gaining favourable treatment from rulers to advance their religious and economic interests, even though those rulers have rarely been Jains themselves in terms of personal, family, lineage, or caste religious allegiance. The Jains from **(p.103)** early medieval times have been a dominant mercantile community in western India, on whom rulers of all religious persuasions have relied for the economic health of their realms (as well as personal financial assistance in the succession struggles that marked many of the transitions between reigns). Rulers accordingly have been willing to give support to the Jains as a community. An important function of the monastic leaders of both the Śvetāmbar and Digambar sects has been to intercede with rulers on behalf of their lay and monastic followers. No doubt the considerable financial influence of their lay followers played a significant part in the political influence of the monks, who in theory were possessionless as a result of the vows that were part of their monastic initiation. Equally important as a source of social power was their renown as spiritual masters, who through their ascetic and ritual practices were able to harness spiritual powers to act in the world. Examples of monks exercising religious and social influence over rulers include Śīlaguṇasūri in the eighth-century Cāvaḍā court (Cort 1998, 94–6), Hemacandra in the twelfth-century Caulukya court (Cort 1998, 89–94, 96–102),

Jinaprabhasūri in the Tughluq court (Sheikh 2010, 141–2), Hīravijayasūri and other monks in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Mughal court (Dundas 2002, 146–7), and Buddhisāgarsūri in the twentieth-century Gaekwad court (Cort 1998, 105–6).

While rulers were willing to give support to the Jains, in the interest of the financial welfare of their realm, they were usually reluctant to intercede in intra-Jain affairs. No doubt in part this was out of fear of alienating one faction or another of this economically important community. It was also part of a larger social and cultural understanding in premodern South Asia that privileged the group over the individual, and saw a person's identity as one largely of group membership. To a significant extent, rulers in India have been willing to let intra-religious disputes be settled by the elders of the respective community, unless the disputes spilled out into the broader public sphere. There have been some notable exceptions. For example, in 1125 CE the struggles between Śvetāmbar and Digambar Jains in western India ended up being settled in a famous debate between leading monks of the two communities in the presence of the Caulukya emperor Jayasīṃha Siddharāja. According to Śvetāmbar sources, they were victorious, and the Digambers were banished from the royal capital of Patan (Cort 2001, 36–7).

(p.104) More typical was the royal response to an appeal by lay members of the Śvetāmbar Loṅkā Gacch to the emperor Shah Jahan in 1644 CE. As a result of a quarrel over icon worship in Ahmedabad, the dominant Mūrtipūjak (icon worshipping) Jains, led by Śāntīdās Jhaverī, the *nagarśeṭh*, or 'mayor', of Ahmedabad, had broken off marriage, dining, and commercial relations with the members of the Loṅkā Gacch, who opposed image worship. The latter appealed to the emperor to order Śāntīdās and the other icon-worshipping Jains in the citywide merchant guild (*mahājan*) to reinstate them into the community. Shah Jahan declined to interfere in the quarrel. He pronounced that the two parties themselves should resolve the matter, and the state should not impose a resolution (Commissariat 1940, 36–7).⁶

In bringing their cause to the larger political and public spheres, Jains have inevitably exposed themselves to larger social, cultural, political, and economic processes. Over the past 1,000 years, northern and western India has seen successive dominant paradigms of rule and social order. The early medieval period saw Brāhmaṇical concepts of kingship and power, in both their Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva forms, in play throughout the region. In the later medieval and premodern period, these interacted with new Islamicate conceptions and practices of kingship and power, in both their Turkish and Persianate forms that came into dominance with the rise of the sultanate kingdoms in Delhi and elsewhere. Finally, the modern period saw British colonialism bring with it conceptions and practices of rule and power rooted in the European

Enlightenment.⁷ In all of these settings, Jain action in the public sphere resulted in inevitable changes to senses of Jain identity as both persons and communities.

(p.105) Premodern Jain Disputes over Icons

Both of the disputes I discuss in this chapter concerned whether or not it is proper for Jains to worship icons of the Jinas, although we will see that they also came to involve much more. Contestations over the propriety of the worship of Jina icons have been a source of discord within the Śvetāmbar Jain communities of western India ever since the time of the layman Loṅkā (ca. 1415–89).⁸ These disputes over the theology of the icon have had larger social and economic consequences, as divisions over ritual practices have resulted in the fission of Jain communities. Splits have occurred both at the local level, as neighbourhood- and city-based congregations have formed separate worship communities, and at the regional level, as castes have split. The consequences, in terms of loss of inter-dining and intermarriage relationships, have been severe at times, for these ritual relationships also formed the basis of socio-economic relationships.

The followers of Loṅkā consisted of locally autonomous monastic lineages and their lay supporters, known generally as Ḍhuṇḍhiyā, Ḍhuṇḍhak, or Ḍhūṇḍhak (‘Seekers’). In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, these lineages and lay congregations started to establish linkages around shared ritual practices and a shared imagined history of origin in the reforms of Loṅkā (Flügel 2008). In the course of this slow, negotiated social alignment, this coalescing community of monks and laity came to be known as Sthānakvāsī, ‘hall dwellers’, referring to the practice of the monks staying in buildings (*sthānak*) that were not connected to temples. In contrast, they termed the Mūrtipūjak Jains as Derāvāsī, ‘temple dwellers’.

The nineteenth-century disputes no doubt were important catalysts in the creation of a shared identity as Sthānakvāsī Jains. In the same period, the equally highly localized networks of Mūrtipūjak monks and their lay supporters also established linkages that led to a geographically more encompassing sense of Mūrtipūjak identity. Just as important were the patterns of migration and residence made possible by the political stability introduced into western India by British colonial rule after more than a century of conflict among Maratha, **(p. 106)** Rajput, and other local rulers. With this stability came increased economic opportunities, of which the Jains quickly took advantage. Communities that had been more geographically distinct in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries now found themselves living side by side in new economic metropolises, such as Bombay, and revived metropolises, such as Ahmedabad, and had to create a shared imagined identity and history.⁹ This expansion of the space of co-religionists with whom local Jain communities interacted gradually led to the formation of an even larger identity as ‘Jain’.

The Ahmedabad Court Cases, 1820–3

The area of Gujarat and Saurashtra, which had been an economic centre of the Mughal Empire, was in a state of significant disarray in the latter decades of the eighteenth century and the early decades of the nineteenth (see Gillion 1968, 37–73). Trade had always been the economic lifeblood of the region, but was now severely hampered, and many of the cities were depopulated. In the wake of the Maratha wars, and the spread of British suzerainty over all of western India, the new colonial power was concerned to increase the revenues of the area. This involved regularizing land-holding patterns to increase agricultural production. The British also decided to revive the city of Ahmedabad. As a result of the treaty agreements that concluded the last Maratha war, Ahmedabad was under a shared administration of the Gaekwad of Baroda and the Peshwa of Poona. The British convinced the two native rulers to relinquish control of Ahmedabad to them in 1817.

The British exerted much less administrative control over Ahmedabad than they did over many other newly colonized cities in South Asia, for they were mainly concerned to provide the opportunity for commerce to revive. The British were eager for the trade **(p.107)** in silk and especially cotton to return to earlier levels, but the local merchants also took advantage of the new economic opportunities provided by the colonial reach across Asia to enter into the highly lucrative trade in opium. Since Gujarati merchants had long traded in an area that stretched from Southeast Asia to the eastern coast of Africa, the combination of the nineteenth-century Pax Britannica in the Indian Ocean, and the development of larger and faster means of sea transport, allowed Jain merchants to expand the range and scale of their enterprises significantly throughout the nineteenth century. This expansion of the economic space inhabited by Jain merchants paralleled, as we will see, an expansion of their socio-religious space.

The British were content to let much of the control over local social and cultural affairs rest with the traditional officials. This meant deferring to the *qāzī* (Muslim magistrate or judge) on matters of concern to the Muslim community, and the Jain *nagarśeṭh* on matters of concern to the Hindu and Jain communities. Nonetheless, the traditional authority of these two leaders was ‘supplemented in many ... judicial functions by the British courts’ (Gillion 1968, 58).¹⁰

When direct control of Gujarat and Ahmedabad came into the hands of the British, the Jains continued the practice of appealing to the rulers as one tactic in waging religious disputes. For example, in 1815 there was a dispute in Surat between two parties of Mūrtipūjak Jains over the long-standing problem of how to determine the proper solar days on which to perform religious obligations when the traditional lunar-solar calendar did not correspond with the solar calendar. According to the account of this event by the victors, on the one side

was a monk who claimed to be knowledgeable in traditional Indian astronomy (*jyoti-śāstra*), and on the other was the monk Vīrvijay, one of the leading Jain intellectuals of the day. The dispute ended up in court, where the British judge, described sartorially as a ‘hat wearer’ (*ṭopīvālā*), exerted his authority (*daṇḍīyā*) and found in favour of Vīrvijay.¹¹

Several years after the Surat dispute, Vīrvijay was in Ahmedabad, where what would appear to have been a long simmering dispute **(p.108)** between icon worshipers and icon rejecters also resulted in the two sides going to court. According to the later Sthānakvāsī accounts, a Jain layman in Ahmedabad publicly rejected the worship of icons.¹² In response, the followers of the icon-worshipping monks expelled the man from his caste. About the same time, the Ḍhuṇḍhiyā monk Prāg, who had initiated a number of laymen as monks, and had preached and spread the Ḍhuṇḍhiyā faith in a number of cities and towns in north and central Gujarat, came to Ahmedabad and preached against icons. Four important laymen and their families accepted his teachings. The icon worshipers became jealous of his success, and eventually the dispute ended up in court. The government called monks from each side to come and debate the issue. Twenty-eight Ḍhuṇḍhiyā monks, led by Jeṭhmal, came from various locales in Gujarat, Saurashtra, and Kacch, and sat in the court (*koṭṭ, sabhā*). The Mūrtipūjaks were led by Vīrvijay, who was assisted by a number of other monks. The debate in court concerned whether or not the Jain scriptures supported the worship of icons. The ruling of the court, issued in early 1822, was in favour of Jeṭhmal and the Ḍhuṇḍhiyās.

Mūrtipūjak accounts give two origins to the dispute. According to one version, Ḍhuṇḍhiyā monks desecrated some icons, and the resulting quarrel ended up in court (*nyāyālay, darbār*).¹³ According to the other version, the quarrel originated within the Vīsā Śrīmālī caste of the nearby town of Sanand, as a result of which the Ḍhuṇḍhiyā laity of Sanand filed a case in the Ahmedabad district court.¹⁴

The Mūrtipūjak accounts agree that the British judge called upon monks from both communities to defend their respective positions on icon worship in court. Vīrvijay was assisted by monks who came from Bhuj, Ahmedabad, and Kheda. The case was sufficiently important that the head of the local Vīsā Śrīmālī caste called on leading laymen from towns and cities throughout Gujarat to come to Ahmedabad and lend their support. Vīrvijay gave the Mūrtipūjak defence of icons. The judge then addressed questions concerning the Jain scriptures **(p. 109)** to the Ḍhuṇḍhiyā monks Jeṭhmal and Narsī. Neither of them could give satisfactory answers, so the judge, according to the Mūrtipūjak accounts, and in contrast to the Sthānakvāsī narratives of the case, decided in favour of Vīrvijay and the Mūrtipūjaks, and confirmed that icon worship was in accordance with the Jain scriptures. In the words of one account, ‘The Ḍhuṇḍhaks were expelled from the assembly’ (Uttamvijay 1822, 7b).

It is not surprising that the historians for both sides claimed victory. The actual records of the court cases, however, reveal a somewhat different outcome, and in fact show that the legal issues considered by the court differed from the theological ones that were central according to the later sectarian accounts.¹⁵ According to the official record, the Mūrtipūjak Bīsā (Vīsā) Śrīmālīs of Sanand took advantage of the new political environment in western India control to expel several Ḍhuṇḍhiyās from the caste. They first did this in 1800, when Sanand was under the control of the Gaekwad of Baroda. They then confirmed this action in 1815, as the British were coming into control. The Ḍhuṇḍhiyās filed six cases in the new British courts, which found in their favour. When the Mūrtipūjaks refused to re-admit the Ḍhuṇḍhiyās, one of the latter filed a suit in the Ahmedabad district court on 13 August 1820, seeking 10,000 rupees in damages.

In the eyes of the court, the issue was whether or not, in the case of a caste with members of different religious sects, the dominant party can expel the others. We see in the transcript that the British judge was struggling to understand the complicated (and often locally variable) relations between caste and religion among the Jains of Gujarat (see Banks 1992, chs 2 and 4; Cort 2004). At that time, the British courts in the Bombay Presidency gave primacy to caste in their efforts to understand and oversee Indian society. This emphasis was encoded a few years later in the Bombay Presidency Regulations of 1827, which ‘represent[ed] castes as the only relevant category in which to recognize collective governance in indigenous society’ (Shodhan 2001, 2; see also Kotani 2002, 86–111; Shodhan 2010). In order to understand better the particulars of the case, the judge, W.A. Jones, decided ‘it was essential to understand in what the two sects differed, for which purpose each party was called on to bring a priest of their **(p.110)** own persuasion’ (Borradaile 1862–3, 655). Jones first questioned the Ḍhuṇḍhiyā monks Jeṭhmal and Narsī, and then the Mūrtipūjak monk Virvijay. The transcript gives a very accurate account of the differences between the sects on matters of scripture, icons, and monastic practice. Significantly, however, Jones did not pursue this line of inquiry, which obviously was the centrepiece of the court case according to the later sectarian accounts. Instead, his inquiries continued to focus on caste organization. In the end, he issued his verdict in December 1823 that the caste leaders did not have to re-admit the expelled Ḍhuṇḍhiyās, even though outcasting obviously led to social and financial hardship. Since both parties were equally to blame for the social rift and subsequent court case, he ordered that the court costs be shared by the two. The Ḍhuṇḍhiyās appealed the verdict, and a second judge in Ahmedabad, J. Sutherland, confirmed the verdict, since the appeal had raised no new issues. He did, however, refer the appeal to the higher court in Surat, on the grounds that the case was of sufficient importance to warrant a review. The Surat court, under Chief Judge J. Romer, again confirmed the verdict, and charged the Ḍhuṇḍhiyās the costs of the appeal.

In many respects, the ruling in this case conformed to the British view in the 1820s that caste was the primary, even primordial, unit of Indian society. However, a closer reading of the transcript indicates that new conceptions of the rights-bearing individual were entering into the law. Amrita Shodhan (2001, 67) has written that according to the Bombay Code of 1827, ‘The caste could regulate matters relating to its members as long as *the civil rights of the individual were not violated*’ (emphasis added). This is exactly what we see in the Ahmedabad verdict. Judge Sutherland gave priority to the caste, but recognized that in doing so individuals who went against the caste could suffer hardship. His ruling specified that while the Mūrtipūjak majority could expel the Ḍhūṇḍhiyās, marriages either past or future between the two parties were not invalid. Further, the caste could not punish any Mūrtipūjak members who chose to interact with the outcasted Ḍhūṇḍhiyā members. Finally, if the Ḍhūṇḍhiyās chose to relinquish their sectarian tenets, and adhere to the Mūrtipūjak tenets, the leaders and each individual member of the caste would have to readmit them or else be liable for damages.

(p.111) The British were interested in preserving law and order, and establishing the necessary conditions for the enhancement of trade and therefore both revenue and tax income in western India. They were no more interested in rendering judgment on issues of ritual theology within the religious communities whose members they now found themselves ruling, than had been the Mughals a century-and-a-half before. Nonetheless, the application of English law, with its Enlightenment assumptions about the rights-bearing individual, led in the nineteenth century to a new conception of the person, which, in turn, contributed to new understandings of the ‘religions’ to which these individuals belonged.

According to later Sthānakvāsī authors, some of the Ḍhūṇḍhiyā lay participants in the case committed Jeṭhmal’s arguments to writing in order to record them for posterity (‘Bhūmikā’ to Jeṭhmal 1930, 4; V.M. Śāh 1909, 79). The resulting book, first published six decades later in 1882, was the *Samakitsār* (‘Essence of Right Belief’). The arguments in the *Samakitsār* almost all revolved around the Śvetāmbar scriptures, and whether or not they authorize the worship of Jina icons. The Mūrtipūjak account written immediately following the case, Uttamvijay’s *Ḍhūṇḍhak Mat Rās*, gave the arguments that Vīrvijay used to defend icons. He also quoted extensively from the Śvetāmbar scriptures. The arguments on both sides were largely consistent with those advanced in debates on icons from the previous three centuries. In other words, that this debate occurred under British rule, and not during the rule of a Muslim or Hindu king, was purely coincidental in terms of the competing theologies of icons.

Nor were the immediate social consequences of the 1820–3 cases new. The Mūrtipūjak assertion that icons were desecrated may very well be a rhetorical flourish, as there is little if any concrete evidence of Ḍhūṇḍhiyās or Sthānakvāsīs

ever engaging in acts of physical iconoclasm. Given their contention that one of the main reasons icon worship was wrong was that it involved violence (*hiṃsā*), the violent desecration of an icon would place the perpetrator in a highly contradictory moral state. Just verbally urging people to ignore icons could easily be seen by icon worshipers as an act of desecration. The dispute over icons in 1820–3 resulted in splitting the Jain lay congregation, as the icon-worshipping *Viśā Śrīmālīs* expelled the opponents of icons **(p.112)** from the caste. Unless the exiles were in sufficient numbers to constitute a new caste, the consequences of this could be severe, as it would seriously affect the ability to contract marriage alliances, and could also have a detrimental impact on business opportunities. In a business culture that is based largely on socio-moral worth (Cort 1991, 406–10), and not on legal contracts, outcasting would have a direct and potentially severe economic consequence. Here again, this was not new, as a century-and-a-half earlier Shah Jahan was asked to intervene in a case of outcasting due to a quarrel over icons.

Nonetheless, there were differences, ones that would come to have greater significance as the distinctly English concept of ‘law’ grew in dominance in Indian society (Bayly 2004, 81–2, 261–5, 336–40). Traditional Indian councils that were concerned with intra-religious, intra-caste, and intra-occupational disputes assumed that the parties to the quarrel were part of a larger organic community, and the goal was to restore and preserve community purity and harmony. Outcasting was a drastic measure of last resort, done only when no other means to maintain the integrity of the community seemed possible. The English legal system, on the other hand, assumed that the people involved in the quarrel were rights-bearing individuals, and often the goal of the court proceeding was to assert the rights of the individual against the larger group. The individual monks were called as witnesses. The *Mūrtipūjak* monk *Vīrvijay* is described as sitting in a chair (*khurśī*), not the throne-like seat (*gādī*) on which a Jain monk would traditionally sit (Jośī 1996, 15). His ritually superior status within the Jain community was lessened in the secular courtroom setting, as the British judge treated him little differently than any other witness. The witnesses were asked questions by the judge in an adversarial proceeding that was intended to arrive at the singular truth of the matter. In theory, at least, the judge gave his ruling based on the logic of the arguments advanced by both sides, and the supporting evidence of the witnesses, and not on the relative social importance of the two sides. English law treats individuals, each of whom stands before the court as equal, and so can be separated from the community (caste, religion) into which the person was born. The discrete contextual sense of the socially embedded person was slowly being replaced by a new sense of the rights-bearing universal individual (Shodhan 2001, 57–58; Washbrook 1981, 649–50).

(p.113) Gujarat, Bombay, and the Punjab, 1875–1905

The publication of Jeṭhmal's *Samakitsār* in 1882 was in direct response to the publication in Ambala in 1881 of *Jain Tattvādarś* ('The Essentials of Jainism') by the Mūrtipūjak monk Muni Ānandvijay (1837–97), who was better known by his previous Sthānakvāsī name of Ātmārām. As a young man, Ātmārām was drawn to a spiritual life by the death of his father, and turned to Ḍhuṇḍhiyā monks for solace and guidance.¹⁶ He took initiation as the Ḍhuṇḍhiyā monk Ātmārām in 1853. He began an intensive study of the Śvetāmbar Jain scriptures. From these studies, it was clear that the worship of icons was extensively described in the scriptures. His studies also convinced him that there was no scriptural authority for the Sthānakvāsī practice of permanently tying on a mouth-mask (*muhpatti*). While there are other differences of practice and theology between the Sthānakvāsīs and the Mūrtipūjaks, the worship of icons and the wearing of the muhpatti are the most visible and hence the most contentious differences. By the mid-1860s, Ātmārām was firmly in agreement with the Mūrtipūjaks on both issues. He began actively to preach on behalf of icon worship and against the muhpatti, and finally in 1874 in Hoshiarpur, he publicly took off his muhpatti, a visual marker of his de facto break with the Sthānakvāsī community. The Jain nagarśeṭh and other leading Jain laymen of Ahmedabad invited this now well-known monk to spend the rainy-season retreat in their city in 1875. There he took a new initiation as a Mūrtipūjak monk, with the formal name of Ānandvijay, although he continued to be known as Ātmārām.

The book for which Ātmārām is best known is his 1881 *Jain Tattvādarś*. In 1880 he spent his rainy-season retreat in Gujranwala, in the Punjab. The laity there said that they had no access to the Sanskrit and Prakrit texts, and so their understanding of Jain doctrines was limited. They asked Ātmārām to write a book in Hindi to address the problem.

While Ātmārām was in Gujranwala, a layman brought to his attention *Satyārth Prakāś* ('Light of Truth'), published five years earlier **(p.114)** in 1875 by Dayānand Sarasvatī, the charismatic founder of the Ārya Samāj, and one of the best-known nineteenth-century Hindu 'reformers.'¹⁷ He aggressively criticized icon worship and other practices that he viewed as corruptions of the original Hinduism, which, he argued, was to be found solely in the Vedas. Dayānand's criticisms were by no means limited to Hindu icon worshipers. He attacked Jainism on two counts. He said that Jainism was the same as Buddhism, and that both were derived from the ancient Indian materialist school of Cārvāka. Jainism, therefore, represented the sole living survivor of ancient Indian materialist atheism. Since atheist materialism was disastrous for Indian culture, Dayānand said that Jainism needed to be checked and eradicated (Dayānand 1932, iii; cf. Dayānand 1972, 6). Second, Dayānand also attacked the Jains for their supposed invention of the worship of icons (Dayānand 1932, 324; cf. Dayānand 1972, 427).

Ātmārām was understandably upset when he read *Satyārth Prakāś*. In particular, he took offense at the labelling of Jainism as an atheist (*anaiśvarvād*) religion and the claim that Jainism, Buddhism, and Cārvāka were the same. Ātmārām had already started to write *Jain Tattvādarś* when he first read *Satyārth Prakāś* in Gujranwala, but there is no doubt that the need to reply to Dayānand's claims that Jainism was merely a part of Cārvāka, and that the Jains were therefore materialist atheists, shaped the evolving book. At the same time that Ātmārām was writing *Jain Tattvādarś*, however, the dispute between him and Dayānand took another, more public route.¹⁸

Among those who heard Ātmārām publicly criticize Dayānand's book in Gujranwala was a layman originally from that town but then resident in Bombay, named Ṭhākurdās Mūlraj. Ṭhākurdās commenced an extensive correspondence with Dayānand. He sent his first letter to Dayānand on 3 July 1880 (Dayānand 1980-3, 3, 105-6).¹⁹ Ṭhākurdās said that the passage quoted by Dayānand that averred (p.115) that Jainism, Buddhism, and Cārvāka were one and the same was not from a Jain text, and asked Dayānand for his source. When he did not receive a speedy reply, he sent another letter on 12 July (Dayānand 1980-3, 3, 106-07). In the second letter he said that if he did not hear from Dayānand soon, he would take the matter to court (*adālat*). He sent at least five more letters to Dayānand over the next four months. In each one, he demanded to know Dayānand's sources, and threatened to take him to court, saying that what he had written in *Satyārth Prakāś* was an insult (*nindā, gālī*) to the Jains.

Dayānand obviously did not take the first several letters seriously. After the second letter, he deputed one of his assistants, Mantrī Ānandīlāl of Meerut, to respond to Ṭhākurdās. The Āryas soon realized that the real person with whom they should be corresponding was Ātmārām, not Ṭhākurdās, so on 23 October 1880, another of Dayānand's assistants, Nārāyaṇ Kṛṣṇa of Gujranwala, wrote directly to Ātmārām (Dayānand 1980-3, 4, 631). He said that since Ātmārām had not accepted an offer for a formal public debate (*śāstrārth*), he should at least engage in the correspondence himself. Ātmārām agreed to enter the fray, and wrote to Dayānand on 4 November 1880. Dayānand in turn cited several medieval texts for his claim that Jainism, Buddhism, and Cārvāka were one and the same, and also indicated that an important source for this information was the popular history textbook, *Itihās Timir Nāśak* ('History as the Dispeller of Darkness'). This was written by the well-known Banaras-based educator Rājā Śivprasād. The third part of this book, in which Śivprasād discussed the shared ancient history of Jainism and Buddhism, had appeared in 1873, and Dayānand had used this information in the first edition of his *Satyārth Prakāś*, published in 1875. In his letter to Ātmārām, he said that Śivprasād was by birth a Jain, and so was a reliable source on Jain history.

Ātmārām and Dayānand exchanged another round of letters in January 1881. The two rehearsed earlier discussions. It appears that the two leaders of the dispute chose not to continue the correspondence. By late 1880, however, the dispute had become more public, as both sides published letters in local newspapers in the Punjab (Lekhrām 1986, 666–72). The circle of participants had also expanded.

In response to Dayānand's claim that Rājā Śivprasād was a reliable Jain source for the identification of Jainism with Buddhism (p.116) and Cārvāka, Ṭhākurdās wrote directly to Śivprasād. In return, the historian wrote to the Jains of Gujranwala and amended the statements in his book (Lekhrām 1986, 672). He wrote that Jainism and Buddhism had never been the same, and that this had recently been proven by a German scholar. This was a reference to Hermann Jacobi's 'Introduction' to his 1879 edition of the *Kalpa Sūtra*, in which he definitively put to rest the misperception among many European scholars that Jainism was an offshoot of Buddhism. The Jains published Śivprasād's letter in the Punjab newspaper *Mitra Vilās* on 4 April 1881 (Lekhrām 1986, 672).

By 1882, Dayānand was in Bombay. Ṭhākurdās confronted him in person there,²⁰ and again challenged him to a public debate. Dayānand's assistant, Sevāklāl Kṛṣṇadās, wrote a letter to Ṭhākurdās on 5 June 1882, explaining that the Āryas declined to accept Ṭhākurdās's terms for a debate (Dayānand 1980–3, 2, 570). Ṭhākurdās responded quickly. On 13 June 1882, his high court solicitors, Smith and Frere, sent a notice to Dayānand charging him 'with a deliberate intention of wounding and offending the religious feelings, of our client and other followers of the Jain religion [by inserting in *Satyārth Prakāś*] certain slokes (stanzas) belonging to certain other religion opposed to that of the Jains alleging that such slokes belong to the Jain religion' (Dayānand 1980–3, 3, 240–1). Further, they called upon Dayānand 'to withdraw the allegations from your said book ... within a week from the service hereof and to apologize to our client and his co-religionists through some local daily papers in English and Goojrathi for such publication and discontinue to circulate your said book as long as the said Slokes are not taken out'. The letter concluded by threatening Dayānand with further legal action: 'In default of your compliance with the above request our client will without further notice take such legal steps as may be advanced in the matter holding you liable for consequence thereof' (Dayānand 1980–3, 3, 241).

The response came within the stipulated week, in a letter to Smith and Frere from another Bombay legal firm, Payne and Gilbert (Dayānand 1980–3, 2, 576–7). They argued first that Dayānand had (p.117) quoted the verses in question 'from works published by person of great reputation among the Jains', that is, Śivprasād. They averred that Dayānand only sought the truth, and was not motivated by any intention to offend the Jains. In other words, they argued that Dayānand had not engaged in an act that could legally be framed as defamatory. They said that Dayānand would gladly remove the passages from a planned

second edition, if he was furnished adequate proof that he had misspoken about the passages. Finally, Payne and Gilbert pointed to a statement at the beginning of *Satyārth Prakāś* in which the publisher had accepted ‘the whole responsibility in respect of the book’, and said that as a result ‘the further sale and publication of the book are entirely under the control of the publisher’. While Dayānand did not remove the offending passages from the second edition, but continued to cite Śivprasād as a source for the statements that Jainism and Buddhism were identical, and both were descended from Cārvāka, the matter between Dayānand and Ṭhākurdās seems to have ended with this exchange of legal notices. Ṭhākurdās subsequently included the exchange of letters in a tract denouncing Dayānand that he published in 1882 with the pugnacious title ‘A Slap to the Face of Dayānand Sarasvatī’ (*Dayānand Sarasvatī Mukh-capeṭikā*).

Libel and the Legal Construction of the Individual

Ṭhākurdās’s threat to sue Dayānand, for deliberately ‘wounding and offending the religious feelings, of our client and other followers of the Jain religion’, marked a distinctly new means by which Jains could pursue their interests in the public sphere. The feelings of the Ḍhuṇḍhiyās and Mūrtipūjaks presumably were also wounded in the 1821–2 dispute in Ahmedabad, but that was not the reason the dispute ended up in court. Filing a suit to address the demonstrable social and economic damages caused by outcasting was different from filing a case to address hurt feelings.

Here, it is useful to remember that Bombay—and to a lesser extent, all of India—had been fixated just two decades earlier by a famous libel case, which has become known in subsequent history as the ‘Maharaj Libel Case. On 21 October 1860, Karsandās Mūljī, a young man who had been born in the Puṣṭimārg Vaiṣṇava sect but now viewed himself as a reformer, published an essay in the Bombay **(p.118)** Gujarati-language newspaper *Satya Prakāś*, in which he criticized the Puṣṭimārg as a recent Hindi heterodoxy, and its leaders, the *mahārājs*, as immoral. In particular, he said that it was common for the mahārājs to have sex with women followers. He mentioned by name Jādūnāth Mahārāj, one of the mahārājs resident in Bombay. On 14 May 1861, Jādūnāth Mahārāj’s lawyer, Edmund Leathes, filed a plaint in the Supreme Court of Bombay, in which he claimed that Karsandās had published a ‘false, scandalous, malicious, infamous and defamatory libel’ (Maharaj 1911, 8). The plaint claimed that as result of the publication, many people had started to shun the mahārāj, and had ceased giving their customary donations to him. The suit asked for 50,000 rupees in damages.

The British court had been in operation in Bombay for nearly two centuries. The governor of Bombay, General Aungier, had opened the court on 8 August 1672. In his inaugural statement, Aungier noted that the inhabitants of Bombay consisted of many different nationalities and religions—‘to wit, English, Portuguess and other Christians, Moores [Muslims] and Jentues [Hindus]’—but

that none of these social factors mattered in the court of law. When anyone entered the court, the judge had to look upon all people of these diverse backgrounds 'with a single eye ... without distinction of Nation or Religion, for they are all His Majesties and the Honble' (quoted in Haberman 1993, 46). In traditional Indian conceptions of justice, a person's social location—gender, caste, religion, and age—was constitutive of his or her legal persona, and thus a person was embedded in larger social units. Under the English conception of justice, however, everyone was an individual who was in theory equal in the eyes of the law, and the relational factors were not definitive. English law, in other words, brought into India a distinctly new and different conception of the person, defined as an individual.

The Bombay trial also occurred just as another major change was underway in the British legal system in India. Following the takeover of the British East India Company by the British government in 1858, what had been separate judiciaries in the different Presidencies, operating under slightly different legal codes, were brought together starting in 1861. From 1862 to 1869, a single Indian legal code was developed (Shodhan 2001, 73; 2010). As part of this process, caste as a social category, and therefore caste rules, were accorded less (p.119) legal autonomy. In particular, the pan-Indian legal code increasingly recognized the equality of all individuals before the law, and therefore came to privilege the individual as the primary way of understanding personhood (Shodhan 2001, 137).

As Amrita Shodhan has shown, the Maharaj Libel Case of 1862 was instrumental in the shift of legal focus from the caste to the individual. She writes, 'The idea of the contractual individual was created in contradistinction with the affinal community' (2001, 200). Before the libel trial itself could begin, a separate trial, known as the Bhattia Conspiracy Case, needed to be held. One of the laymen who was organizing the case for the mahārāj explained the consequences of losing the case to leading members of the sect. On 6 September 1861, the Bhattias, one of the merchant castes whose members were followers of the mahārāj, held a meeting. They resolved that any member of the caste who testified against the mahārāj 'should be called to account according to the rules of the caste' (Maharaj 1911, 60). While this was a time-honoured method of ensuring caste solidarity, it was clearly in violation of the principles of English law, and as a result nine leaders were indicted 'for conspiring to obstruct and defeat the course of justice, by dissuading and preventing certain witnesses from giving evidence' (Maharaj 1911, 61). After a trial in December 1861, all nine defendants were found guilty of conspiracy. In January 1862, the court heard the libel case.²¹

The libel case itself has become famous in scholarship on India for the fact that the British judges transformed it from a trial on the narrower issue of libel into a broader inquisition into the very meaning of Hinduism (Haberman 1993).²²

While Karsandās was found guilty on some minor charges, he was cleared of the principal charge of libel, and Jādūnāth Mahārāj was ordered to pay Karsandās's court costs.

The concept of libel that was brought to India by English law entails a distinctly new concept of the person. Defamation—of which libel is the written form, and slander its oral form—has a long history, going back through common law to Rome **(p.120)** (Carter-Ruck, Walker, and Starte 1992, 17–19; Holt 2005, 15; Latham 2009, 74–5). Laws against defamation recognize that an individual's reputation is an essential element in his public persona, and to the extent that social and economic credit depends on reputation, his economic persona as well. W. Blake Odgers, in a comprehensive treatise on defamation that for many decades was the definitive source on the subject in England, wrote, 'No man may disparage or destroy the reputation of another. Every man has a right to have his good name maintained unimpaired. This right is a *jus in rem*, a right absolute and good against all the world' (Odgers and Ritson 1929, 1). The classic treatise on the Indian variant of English law echoes this, and makes the economic significance more evident: 'Every man has an absolute right to have his reputation preserved inviolate. This right of reputation is acknowledged as an inherent personal right of every person. ... A man's reputation is his property, and, if possible, more valuable than other property' (Ranchhoddas and Thakore 1903, 176).²³

Libel, more specifically, involves speech that is defamatory, refers to the plaintiff, and has been 'published', that is, communicated to a third person (Carter-Ruck, Walker, and Starte 1992, 34). Discussing the Indian context, Ranchhoddas and Thakore (1903, 178) add that defamatory speech consists of 'any words ... which expose the plaintiff to hatred, contempt, ridicule, or obloquy, which tend to injure him in his profession or trade, or cause him to be shunned or avoided by his neighbours'. The requirement that libel be written and 'published' speech means that it rose significantly in **(p.121)** prominence in the late eighteenth and throughout the nineteenth centuries with the global rise in both literacy and widely distributed newspapers (Carter-Ruck, Walker, and Starte 1992, 27). As newspapers came to create and shape a public space, the legal concept of libel increasingly served the important function of separating fiction from fact, and thereby protected the individual against the power of the printed word (Latham 2009, 78).

The concept of libel as defined by the courts was an important element in the new legal (and, therefore, cultural) definition of person as a rights-bearing, property-owning individual. While the legal antecedents of this are quite ancient, the new sense of a person was an integral element of the Enlightenment project that has led to the spread in the past two centuries of the conjoined concepts and practices of individual rights and capitalism. While historians often focus on the grand theorists of the individual, such as Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Paine,

and Jefferson, and the authors of the French Declaration of the Rights of Man, the US Constitution, and the US Bill of Rights, these ideas quickly became part of and spread through the legal system. As the British colonial rulers expanded their use of English law in the nineteenth century in place of Indic forms of law (Menski 2006, 239–49), and as more and more Indians came to use the colonial courts to resolve conflicts, the concept of the individual who is defined apart from such social categories as caste and religion became increasingly normative and constitutive in India in place of the conception of the person as embedded in caste and religion.

We see the importation of this new conception of the person as an individual clearly in the Maharaj Libel Case. Jādūnāth Mahārāj sued Karsandās Mūljī because he personally had been named in the latter’s article, and so he could reasonably claim that he had been injured as an individual. If he had not been mentioned, it is unlikely that the judges would have accepted the case. The law of libel is clear that ‘the words complained of must concern the plaintiff’ (Ranchhoddas and Thakore 1903, 180). If Karsandās had merely alleged that all Puṣṭimārg mahārājs were corrupt, that might not have been sufficient to give Jādūnāth Mahārāj legal standing to sue for libel, for ‘if a man were to write that all lawyers were thieves, no particular lawyer could sue him unless there is something to point to the particular individual’ (Ranchhoddas and Thakore 1903, 179).

(p.122) Ṭhākurdās’s threat to sue Dayānand, however, indicates one of the ways that legal conceptions of offensive speech in India have been expanded beyond the English definition of libel, and now represent an Indian hybrid form. Dayānand did not mention any Jains by name in the first edition of *Satyārth Prakāś*. The claim of Ṭhākurdās, therefore, that Dayānand had written that Jainism and Cārvāka were the same ‘with a deliberate intention of wounding and offending the religious feelings of our client’ (Dayānand 1980–3:3, 240) was far-fetched. But Ṭhākurdās expanded the aggrieved party to include ‘other followers of the Jain religion’. Ṭhākurdās demanded that Dayānand apologize both to him and ‘to the followers of the Jain religion’.

We see here an early instance of what has increasingly become a common practice in India: suing (or threatening to sue) a person because of an alleged offense to the ‘feelings’ of an entire community. This is not part of the law of defamation in India, which retains the earlier English and common law emphasis on harm to the individual. Instead, it is included among ‘offences relating to religion’ in the criminal code (Chitaley and Appu Rao 1974:1, 72–3). In particular, sub-section 295A of the Indian Penal Code pertains to ‘whoever, with the deliberate and malicious intention of outraging the religious feelings of any class of citizens of India, by words, either spoken or written or by signs or by visible representation or otherwise, insults or attempts to insult the religion or the religious beliefs of that class’ (Chitaley and Appu Rao 1974:1, 73). While this

sub-section was added to the Penal Code only in 1927, and the specific language referring to citizens of India was added after Independence, in 1950 (Chitaley and Appu Rao 1974:2, 739), the wording of the letter that Ṭhākurdās's solicitors sent to Dayānand clearly followed the wording of sections 295–8 of the Indian Penal Code of 1860, on religious offenses. In recent years, religious groups that have claimed that their sentiments have been wounded have included Muslims, Hindus, Christians, Vaiṣṇavas, Sikhs, Jews, and Jains (Cohen 2010, 270–1).

Tracing the legal manoeuvrings that were part of the disputes in the 1860s between Karsandās Mūljī and Jādūnāth Mahārāj, and in the 1880s between the Jains and the Ārya Samāj, shows us how the conceptions of both the person and the religiously defined group underwent change in the nineteenth century. The new legal system increasingly defined the person as a rights-bearing individual, who **(p.123)** stood partially apart from a broader identity in terms of caste. Religion increasingly was seen as something separate from caste, and as a more important category of social organization than caste. Further, while someone was born into a religion, it was no longer seen solely as an ascribed identity category; it was also an institution that the autonomous person—the individual—could voluntarily choose to join or not.

At the same time, the person came to be defined centrally in terms of a broad category of 'co-religionists' (and this was a category that transcended caste). The 1820–3 cases assumed that identity was defined by caste; 'religion', in the sense that all 'Jains' were 'co-religionists', did not figure. The disputants were recognized by the British judges and by themselves, as members of the Viśā Śrīmālī caste. The disputants also identified themselves by sectarian labels, as Ḍhūṇḍhiyās and Mūrtipūjaks,²⁴ but these were not primary social units for the judges. Only twice did the trial records use the word 'Jain': once to characterize five castes that interdined as Mūrtipūjaks in contrast to the Ḍhūṇḍhiyās (Borradaile 1862–3, 659), and just once to refer to a social unit inclusive of Ḍhūṇḍhiyās and Mūrtipūjaks that stood in contrast to Mesrees (Meśrīs) or Hindus (Borradaile 1862–3, 658). In other words, there was hardly any sense of a common religious identity as 'Jain', or a shared religion known as 'Jainism'. Six decades later, we see the emergence of a legal conception that all Jains regardless of caste and sect shared an identity, one that was based upon an inclusive definition of the new social category of 'religion'. Ṭhākurdās threatened to sue Dayānand on behalf of 'all followers of the Jain religion', a category that for him was inclusive of the sectarian groups that had fought the earlier court cases. As we will see, it was also at this time that the term 'Jain' began for the first time to appear in the titles of books. Civil society organizations with 'Jain' in their names began to form, with the claim that they represented Jains as an imagined community from all over India. The legal emphasis on the individual framed religion as more of a voluntary association; but the changing dynamics of community belonging simultaneously framed **(p. 124)** it as a fundamental category. One can argue that 'Jainism' as a unified

social unit has historically been a fiction, but in the practice of the legal system it came to be a social reality. This creation of 'Jainism' as a pan-Indian identity, however, was not dependent solely on the legal system; rather, other forces of modernity, in particular changes in the technologies of communication and transportation, brought to India by British colonialism, played an equally formative role. To see how 'Jainism' emerged as a pan-Indian religion (and eventually a global 'world religion'), we now need to turn to these other processes.

Modernity as the Transformation of Time, Space, and Identity

The past several decades have seen extensive theorization about the social, cultural, political, and economic processes known collectively as modernity. These discussions often refer equally to globalization, since, in the words of Anthony Giddens (1990, 63), 'modernity is inherently globalizing'.²⁵ One of the central developments of modernity has been the changed experience of time and space. While one might think of time and space as natural phenomena, scholars of modernity have come to see, in the words of David Harvey (1989, 204), 'that objective conceptions of space and time are necessarily created through material practices and processes which serve to reproduce social life'.

Technological changes have led to 'a speeding up of the flows of capital, people, goods, images, and ideas across the world, thus pointing to a general increase in the pace of global interactions and processes' (Inda and Rosaldo 2008, 11). The time it takes to communicate with or travel to a distant place has continually shrunk in the past two centuries. As a result of this shrinkage of time, our sense of space has accordingly expanded. Places that were difficult if not impossible to travel to or communicate with are increasingly a part of **(p.125)** our everyday experience. Places that we used to experience as far away we now experience as nearby.

Three of the new material processes that came to India in the nineteenth century in the wake of British colonialism were the railroad, the postal service, and the printing press. These played a major role in the disputes in the 1880s, in ways that changed the disputes themselves in contrast to the 1820–3 court cases. Under the direction of James Ramsey, marquis of Dalhousie, who was governor-general from 1848 to 1856, the British invested significantly in new networks of communication and transport in order better to tie together the area under their rule.²⁶ The British had spent the five decades from 1790 to 1840 building the network of trunk roads to tie together their expanding possessions (Hamilton 1910, 152). The new technology of the steam locomotive led to the next step, the building of the railway system in India for which the British are still famous. Before 1846, a person wanting to travel from Calcutta to Delhi had to take a steamer to Allahabad and then be conveyed either in a country cart or by coolies. In 1845–6, the bullock train began, as bullock carts were stationed at

regular intervals on the Grand Trunk Road between Allahabad and Delhi. This was replaced in the 1860s by the railroad (Hamilton 1910, 185–6).

Equally innovative was the development of an efficient, affordable postal system. The Imperial Post Office of India was established in 1854 by the Indian Postal Act, just fifteen years after the concept of the penny postcard had been introduced in Britain. ‘Mail could now be sent, the cost to the sender, any distance within the country, at the same low cost. This facility served not only individuals ... but was indispensable to the communications and fundraising of the voluntary societies, organizations, and publishers emerging in this period’ (Metcalf and Metcalf 2006, 99). The Post Office Act of 1866 led to a further set of improvements: as rates were reduced, post offices were built in ever smaller localities, and the speed of the post increased as the efficiency of the railways improved (Hamilton 1910, 173–82). While the British rationale for the expanded postal service may have been political and economic, the service was enthusiastically adopted **(p.126)** by Indians. By the early 1890s, more than half of all correspondence carried by the postal service consisted of letters in vernacular languages (Hamilton 1910, 197). In the Punjab, the number of post offices and letter boxes grew from 842 in 1880 to 4,900 in 1901, and the number of letters carried in the province increased from 343,641 in 1857 to nearly 27 million in 1901 (Kaur 1987, 256).

These changes in travel and communication meant that distant parts of India were tied together in new ways. The time it took to communicate between the Punjab and Bombay drastically shrank, and so the space within which one might meaningfully interact expanded from a walkable region to the whole of the subcontinent.

The 1820–3 dispute was localized in central Gujarat, in the city of Ahmedabad and the nearby town of Sanand. Due to the significance of the dispute, both sides marshalled forces from the region. The *Ḍhūḍhiyās* brought in monks from Kacch, Saurashtra, and north Gujarat. In return, the *Mūrtipūjaks* brought in monks from Kacch and central Gujarat. Because the court case was as much over the issue of caste membership as it was about the worship of icons, the *Mūrtipūjak* head of the *Viśā Śrīmālī* caste in Ahmedabad also summoned leaders of the caste from cities and towns in central and north Gujarat. We do not know exactly how the calls for reinforcements went out, but the merchants of western India had a well-developed system of transporting letters quickly, so the news of the court case could have reached throughout the relevant region within a few days. Presumably it took longer for the monks and merchants to come to Ahmedabad. As part of their initiation vows, monks should eschew the use of any mechanized means of transport, so they probably came on foot. The merchants presumably came on horseback or in bullock carts. Even with the relatively efficient means of communication and travel at the Jains’ command, it must have taken at a minimum several weeks for all the players to be summoned and to

travel from throughout the region to Ahmedabad. Further, the limitations of the communication and transportation technology limited the quarrel to a regional one. *Ḍhuṇḍhiyās* and *Mūrtipūjaks* further afield, in central India, Marwar and the Punjab, most likely never heard of the court case.

Things were much different in the 1880s. The Jain monks still travelled only by foot, and so the new technologies of travel did not **(p.127)** change the space in which they physically could be present. It took *Ātmārām* months to walk from the Punjab to Gujarat, so he stayed in a region for several years. His lay followers, however, could use the new technologies. As a result, *Ṭhākurdās Mūljī* could travel by train from his residence in Bombay to his natal town of Gujranwala to hear the sermons of *Ātmārām*, and then quickly return to Bombay to confront *Dayānand*. The fame of *Ātmārām* had even spread to Bengal. A wealthy Jain zamindar from Murshidabad, *Rāy Bahādur Dhanpatsīṅgh*, heard of *Ātmārām*'s work and came all the way across north India to meet him in Ambala in 1881. *Dhanpatsīṅgh* at the time was engaged in sponsoring the very first printing of the *Śvetāmbar* canon, in Murshidabad, a project that lasted from 1874 to about 1900 (Schubring 1962, 4; Wiles 1997, 1–3). He asked *Ātmārām* what service he could render him. The monk had just completed *Jain Tattvādarś*, and requested *Dhanpatsīṅgh* to publish it. This was done in 1881 in Ambala.

Further, both the monks and the laity availed themselves of the new technologies of communication. *Ṭhākurdās*, *Ātmārām*, *Dayānand*, and *Dayānand*'s assistants engaged in a copious correspondence within the Punjab and north India, and also between the Punjab and Bombay. In response to *Dayānand*'s invocation of the scholarship of *Śivprasād*, *Ṭhākurdās* wrote to *Śivprasād* in Banaras and got him involved in the correspondence as well. *Śivprasād* also cited the latest Indological scholarship from Germany. The letters between the Punjab and Bombay, and the Punjab and Banaras, arrived within days, not months. People in all three locations could be active participants in the same dispute, almost as if in 'real time'.

A third technological change that also shaped the 1880s disputes differently from the 1820–3 court cases involved the new (to India) technology of print. While there were printing presses in Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras in the eighteenth century, the first printing presses were not set up in the Punjab until 1835 (Shaw 1979), and in Gujarat until 1845 (Yagnik and Sheth 2011, 128–30). As a result, the results of the earlier dispute were disseminated through the time-honoured medium of the hand-copied manuscript on hand-made country paper. *Uttamvijay*'s *Ḍhuṇḍhak Mat Rās* exists in just a few copies that have been preserved in Jain libraries. The copy of the text I have used, found now in a research library in Ahmedabad, was **(p.128)** copied in 1832 in Radhanpur, in north Gujarat, by a Jain monk named *Kastūrsāgar*, so that two nuns, *Jīvsrī* and *Navsrī*, could study it. It has never been printed. *Jeṭhmal*'s *Samakitsār* had a similar hand-written existence—an existence so liminal that it has left no trace,

as we know of no manuscript of the text—for six decades until it was first printed in 1882.

Ātmārām and Dayānand, on the other hand, wrote books that were designed to be printed, and hence to be widely read. The imagined audience involved both their supporters and others with whom they disagreed. Further, the audience included a large uncommitted public—a public sphere—whom the authors hoped to sway by their publications. Ṭhākurdās arranged for his correspondence with Dayānand to be printed. While Śivprasād wrote by hand to Ṭhākurdās from Banaras, his rebuttal of Dayānand was printed in a newspaper in the Punjab. Their views were distributed widely through the new medium of print.

Bayly (2004, 359) has written of the formative impact that printing religious texts had upon the religions themselves. While some texts were copied more often than others, and all religious communities had a sense of canon, that is, of those texts that carried greater authority than others, the limited circulation of hand-written manuscripts allowed for a somewhat more fluid sense of authoritative text. With printing, however, authoritative canons were more clearly demarcated. Bayly says, ‘In one sense, one could say that Hindu and Buddhist doctrine were actually created in the nineteenth century, mainly as a consequence of the print revolution. Previously, a massively complex and even contradictory bundle of hallowed traditions had existed. Print allowed Hinduism to be arrayed in textual form in one single bookcase’.

When he started *Satyārth Prakāś*, Dayānand lacked any sense of which Jain texts were authoritative, and even of what texts Jains had authored over the centuries. He depended on manuscripts to which he had access, which from the evidence of the first edition of *Satyārth Prakāś* were very few indeed, if any. In part as a result of this dispute, Jains such as Ātmārām saw that they needed to print their authoritative texts in order to control the perception of both the Jains themselves and the broader public of what Jainism was. The publication by Rāy Bahādur Dhanpatsingh of the full Śvetāmbar Mūrtipūjak canon was part of this same process of delimiting and defining ‘Jainism’.

(p.129) The Emergence of ‘Jainism’

The 1880s disputes involved a much larger area. Instead of just Gujarat, those who read about and felt involved in the disputes came from an area stretching from Calcutta in the east to the Punjab in the west and Bombay in the south. Anthony Giddens (1990, 64) has written that globalization (and, therefore, modernity) results in ‘the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa’. In a similar vein, Jonathan Inda and Renato Rosaldo (2008, 11) say that modernity and globalization entail ‘a stretching of social, cultural, political, and economic practices across frontiers so as to make possible action at a distance—that is, so that happenings,

decisions, and practices in one area of the globe can come to have consequences for communities and cultures in other, often quite distant, locales around the world’.

This is exactly the case here. People could engage in active disputation with others who were hundreds of miles away. Letters would reach across the continent in a matter of a few days, and replies return just as quickly. Ṭhākurdās in his letters to Dayānand several times complained that the latter had been slow in replying; by 1881, it was reasonable to expect a letter to reach a distant location within a few days, and for a reply to be received equally quickly. Participants could travel long distances in those same few days to engage in face-to-face discussions. As a result, Jains, who a century earlier would have felt little connection with each other, now found themselves passionate participants in a common debate. Jainism has always involved an ideological conception of the totality of Jains constituting a single, shared historical community (*saṅgh*). But this has never been a social reality. As an imagined community, the material ties that would allow Jainism to actualize that community have been extremely weak. The technological changes brought to India in the nineteenth century allowed this sense of community to be realized, and thereby gave a new meaning to what it meant to be ‘Jain’.²⁷

(p.130) This new Jain community—comprising those who were followers of or members in ‘Jainism’—was defined in part by its collective opposition to the Ārya Samāj in the debates from the 1880s through the 1900s. Whereas ‘Jain’ in its original sense meant ‘pertaining to the Jinās’, it came increasingly to designate a bounded community of people, and by extension to pertain to a bounded religion (Flügel 2005, 3). This is when we start to find books with ‘Jain’ in the title.

Ātmārām published *Jain Tattvādarś* in 1881, *Jain Mat Vṛkṣ* (‘The Genealogy of Jainism’) in 1886, *Jain Dharm Viśāyāk Praśnottar* (‘Questions and Answers about Jainism’) in 1889, and *Jain Dharm kā Svarūp* (‘The Basics of Jainism’) in 1894 (N.T. Śāh 1936). In addition to precipitating the 1882 publication of Jeṭhmal’s *Samakitsār*, Ātmārām’s *Jain Tattvādarś* was met by a number of criticisms from contemporary Sthānakvāsīs. In particular, the Sthānakvāsī nun Pārvatī (1854–1939) engaged Ātmārām and his disciples in a series of sharply worded exchanges on icons that lasted over several decades.²⁸ She published *Jñān Dīpikā* (‘Lamp of Knowledge’) in 1899 as a direct response to *Jain Tattvādarś*. It had as alternate titles *Jñān Dīpikā Jain* (‘Jain Lamp of Knowledge’) and *Jain Dyot* (‘Light of Jainism’). She later published *Samyaktva Sūryoday Jain* (‘The Sunrise of Jain Right Faith’) and *Satyārth Candrodāy Jain* (‘The Moonrise of the Truth of Jainism’), both in 1905. The next several decades also saw the creation of all-India Jain organizations: the Indian Digambar Jain (Dharmarakṣiṇi) Mahāsabhā in 1895, the Jain Śvetāmbar Conference (for Mūrtipūjaks) in 1902, the All-India Sthānakvāsī Jain Conference in 1905, and, in a largely unsuccessful attempt to

create a single platform for all Jains regardless of sect, the Bhārat Jain Mahāmaṇḍal in 1899 (Wiley 2004, 41–2).

This new understanding of ‘Jainism’ as a single ‘religion’ of ‘co-religionists’ who could have collective sentiments and feelings, and that emerged through the technological enabling of a common imagined **(p.131)** identity, was underscored by the colonial legal system.²⁹ This was part of a broader, global process—one brought to India largely by colonialism, but by no means dependent upon it, as the same processes affected non-colonized Asian countries such as Thailand and Japan—by which bureaucrats and scholars around the world created what have come to be known as bounded, definable ‘religions’.³⁰

Bernard Cohn has argued that both the British rulers and Orientalist scholars engaged in processes of objectification and classification that had a profound impact upon Indian self-understanding, especially on the part of intellectuals (such as Ātmārām and Dayānand). He wrote that in response Indian intellectuals ‘objectified their culture. They in some sense have made it into a “thing”; they can stand back and look at themselves, their ideas, their symbols and their culture and see it as an entity’ (Cohn 1987, 228–9). Religion became a thing that was external to the person. It was something that had an essence (*tattvādarś*) that could be described. As a thing external to the person, it also was something that the person as an autonomous individual could affirm or reject. We see this in the conclusion to the second edition of Dayānand’s *Satyārth Prakāś*. In a passage that was perhaps unique in the history of South Asian religion, and on which to the best of my knowledge no scholar has remarked, Dayānand (1932, 655–63; cf. 1972, 619–28) gave a remarkable ‘Statement of My Beliefs’ (*svamantavyāmantavya prakāś*; literally, ‘Light on What I Do and Don’t Accept’). He listed 51 elements of his beliefs, on theology, cosmology, soteriology, and society. While Dayānand asserted that he was stating his belief in the true nature of reality, the very framework—that ‘religion’ was something that he as an individual had to choose, and that there were beliefs that he chose not to accept—was something new in South Asia.

(p.132) Ātmārām did not lay out his ‘beliefs’ in a similar confessional document, but he was part of the same broader change in South Asian conceptions of identity. In all his fierce disputes with other Jains about what Jainism was, he was part of a new understanding of what it meant to be ‘Jain’: individuals who were members of a religion. This was further a religion that stretched across India and could even be global, a ‘world religion’. Because this understanding was predicated upon the person as an individual who made rational choices in his or her life, there was a sense that one chose to be Jain from among multiple options. This new way of being ‘Jain’ was not due to changes that were unique to the Jain community (or communities). They were part of a larger change in South Asia as a whole, what we can characterize as the coming of modernity to India. These changes were brought by colonialism,

and were an integral part and parcel of the colonialist project; but the project of modernity was larger than colonialism, as it pervaded parts of the globe that were relatively uncolonized, and it survived the decolonizations of the mid-twentieth century. The Jains in the nineteenth century interacted with and were shaped by new public spheres of courts, laws, newspapers, books, postal and telegraph services, and railways. In doing so, their sense of self as both persons and a community inevitably changed. We have seen that there were deep continuities with precolonial modes of public action, but the form of that action was new and created new conceptions of identity.

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Notes:

(*) After the conference, 'Modernity, Diversity and the Public Sphere: Negotiating Religious Identities in 18th–20th Century India', held in Erfurt, 23–5 September 2010, I split my original paper into two chapters, which cover much the same material but ask very different questions of it. This chapter should, therefore, be read in tandem with Cort (2012). I thank the four editors of these two volumes for their forbearance. Subsequent to the conference, I presented material in this evolving chapter on two occasions: a Denison University Global Studies Seminar in January 2011, and at the Centre for the Study of Comparative Religions and Civilizations at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, India, in August 2011.

(¹) While in this chapter I refer to colonialism as 'British', and the resulting governmentalities and law courts, therefore, also as 'British', the legal code brought to India by the British was in fact English law, as there is no uniform legal code in Great Britain (Sharafi 2012).

(²) I borrow this term from Arun Agrawal, who uses it 'to signify new forms of domination and expansion of government' (2005, 238–49). Agrawal, in turn, imports the term from Michel Foucault (Burchell, Gordon and Miller 1991).

(³) The literature here is large. Key examples are Cohn (1987, 224–54 and 1996, Dirks (2001), and Inden (1990). Of direct relevance to this chapter are Flügel (2005) on nineteenth-century constructions of 'Jainism', Shodhan (2001) on ways that legal cases shaped the identities of Bohras as 'Muslims' and Puṣṭīmārg Vaiṣṇavas as 'Hindus', Shodhan (2010) on legal conceptions of caste in colonial Gujarat, Kotani (2002) on ways that British legislation and courts shaped both caste and religious identities, and Sharafi (2013) on legal influences on Parsi identity. Shodhan, Kotani, and Sharafi problematize some of the earlier scholarship. They show ways that it is overly reductionistic, as it fails to see the complexities in early British understandings of Indian society, or to acknowledge the extent to which Indians themselves were active agents in constructing modern public spheres. Washbrook (1981) is a valuable study on how the application of a new legal system changed fundamental aspects of Indian society, in this case the sense of property, which is also directly tied to a new sense of the person as both rights bearing and property owning, a sense that is central to the Enlightenment and thus modernity.

(⁴) See Kotani (2002, 104–7) on disagreeing legal decisions in the late nineteenth century between the Bombay High Court, which argued that caste membership

was a matter of voluntary association analogous to membership in a club, and the Calcutta and Madras High Courts, which argued that caste membership was solely a matter of birth and therefore a matter of ‘necessity’.

⁽⁵⁾ I intentionally use the plural, public spheres. The differences among nineteenth-century public spheres in Gujarat, the Punjab, Banaras, Calcutta, and Bombay were significant. Reducing them to a single public sphere would be simplistic.

⁽⁶⁾ It is not clear whether the report of the 1820–3 court case refers to this or a similar imperial *farmān* (edict). Introduced into evidence was a *farmān* of Shah Jahan dated AH 1054, or 1638 CE, also issued in response to a complaint lodged against Śāntidās and the Mūrtipūjak community by the leaders of the Loṅkā Gacch in Ahmedabad for refusal to intermarry or inter-dine. The *farmān* instructed the two parties to resolve the quarrel on their own, but threatened imperial legal intervention if they should be unable to do so (Borradaile 1862–3, 659).

⁽⁷⁾ Post-Independence India, of course, has brought a new set of dominant paradigms, which are outside the temporal scope of this chapter.

⁽⁸⁾ I have discussed the Jain arguments for and against icons in Cort (2010a and 2010b).

⁽⁹⁾ See Babb (2008) for an insightful discussion of the ways that the economic opportunities and resultant migrations of the nineteenth century necessitated the creation of a shared imagined history among the Dāhimā or Dādhīc Brāhmaṇs of western India. This story could be repeated, with appropriate changes of details, for many caste and religious communities of India in the colonial period.

⁽¹⁰⁾ See Shodhan (2010, 33–4) on the gradual expansion of the British courts in Gujarat from 1759 through the early nineteenth century.

⁽¹¹⁾ Raṅgvijay, *Paṇḍit Vīrvijay Nirvāṇ Rās*; see Jinvijay (1996, 24); Jośī (1996, 12–14).

⁽¹²⁾ This account is based largely on V. M. Śāh (1909, 77–80).

⁽¹³⁾ This is the version given by Raṅgvijay (Jośī 1996, 14), and following him by Jinvijay (1996, 24).

⁽¹⁴⁾ This is the version given by Kāpaḍiyā (1991, 17), G. H. Śāh (1996, 30), and K. Śāh (1999, 7), Uttamvijay (1822, 1a).

⁽¹⁵⁾ Borradaile (1862–3, 650–64) gives a detailed summary of the cases.

⁽¹⁶⁾ My recounting of the biography of Ātmārām comes from Vallabhsūri (1959), except where otherwise indicated. I give a short biography of Ātmārām at Cort (2010a, 5–8).

⁽¹⁷⁾ Information on Dayānand comes from Jordens (1978).

⁽¹⁸⁾ The Jain version of the debate over *Satyārth Prakāś* is found at Vallabhsūri (1959, 229–30). The Ārya Samāj version is found at Lekhrām (1986, 651–75).

⁽¹⁹⁾ The extant correspondence is given in Dayānand (1980–83). Much of it is also given in a tract published in 1882 by Ṭhākurdās with the title *Dayānand Sarasvatī Mukh-capetīkā*. I have not located a copy of it to inspect. The dispute is summarized by Jordens (1978, 190–3).

⁽²⁰⁾ Like many Jains in the nineteenth century, Ṭhākurdās had migrated from his natal village of Gujranwala to Bombay in search of the improved financial opportunities in the metropole.

⁽²¹⁾ The full transcript of the Bhattia Conspiracy Case is in Maharaj (1911, 60–120).

⁽²²⁾ The full transcript of the lengthy Maharaj Libel Case is in Maharaj (1911, 120–480). See also the appendix to Mulji (1865).

⁽²³⁾ My discussion here deals with defamation under civil law. There is also criminal defamation (Chitale and Appu Rao 1974:1, 113–16). One key difference between the two was that ‘civil defamation was decided by a judge alone. By contrast, criminal defamation could be tried by a judge and special jury’ (Sharafi 2013). Further, my quotation from Ranchhoddas and Thakore emphasizes a view of personal reputation as a form of property. They also express, however, an alternate view, which sees reputation as something other than property. Immediately following the passage I have quoted, they write, ‘Indeed, if we reflect on the degree of suffering occasioned by the loss of character, and compare it with that occasioned by loss of property, the amount of the former injury far exceeds that of the latter’ (Ranchhoddas and Thakore 1903, 176). I thank Mitra Sharafi for her invaluable assistance in understanding the Indian version of English law.

⁽²⁴⁾ The actual term used was ‘Tappa’ (Tapā); the Tapā Gacch was the dominant Mūrtipūjak monastic lineage in Gujarat at the time, and the majority of Mūrtipūjak laity was allied to it.

⁽²⁵⁾ He makes nearly the identical point at 1991, 21. In addition to Giddens, my discussion here is based on Harvey (1989, 201–326), Inda and Rosaldo (2008, 7–12), and Tomlinson (1999, 48–60). That these discussions as often refer to

postmodernity as they do to modernity indicates that all three concepts—modernity, post-modernity, and globalization—overlap in significant ways.

(²⁶) Except where otherwise noted, this discussion is based on Metcalf and Metcalf (2006, 94–9).

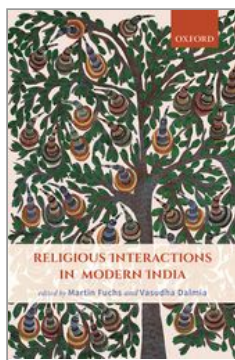
(²⁷) I do not mean to imply that before the nineteenth century, disputes and interactions in India were all highly localized. Rosalind O’Hanlon (2009, 2011) has shown that the Marathi Brahmins in Banaras during the Mughal period were in close contact with the Brahmins in central India. Sitamshu Yashaschandra (2003, 571–3) has discussed the large area covered by the Jain monk Samayasundar in his travels in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, from Lahore and Agra to modern-day Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Sindh.

(²⁸) See Flügel (2008, 201) on Pārvatī.

(²⁹) Of equal if not greater importance was the role of the census, which, when it came to recognize ‘Jain’ as a separate religious category starting in 1871, recognized it only as a single common community, not one subdivided by sectarian rivalries. On the census, see Cohn (1987, 224–54); and on Jains and the census, Brekke (2002, 129–32) and Flügel (2005, 4).

(³⁰) The classic source on this remains Smith (1963), to be supplemented by more recent, deconstructionist critiques such as those of Asad (1993) and Masuzawa (2005).

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Whither Pluralities and Differences?

‘Arya Dharma’ and Hinduism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

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Abstract and Keywords

The chapter explores the turn to the twentieth century as a watershed in the formation of modern Hinduism. It compares two core texts, Dayanand's *Satyarth Prakash* (1875) and the catechism *Sanatana Dharma: An Elementary Textbook of Hindu Religion and Ethics* of Annie Besant and Bhagawan Das (1903). The significant point of difference lies in how the two texts deal with religious difference and pluralities. While in the earlier mode of reformulation of Hinduism, other Hinduistic belief systems and practices were dealt with by denying their validity, but engaging with them, the new mode was one of claiming overarching validity for a singular belief system by subsuming difference, without engaging with the other forms. The other, non-Hinduistic religions were now put strictly outside the Hindu fold. Differences between Hindu traditions were glossed over and the attempt was made to close ranks between even radically different Hindu formations. At the same time, *varnashramadharma* was confirmed.

Keywords: modern Hinduism, Satyarth Prakash, Sanatana Dharma, Hinduism, Hindu traditions, varnashramadharma

Whatever our political position with regard to Hinduism as a singular entity, most of us agree that there are—and were—multiple streams within it. Quibbling about the use of the word ‘Hindu’, tracing its origins, its antiquity, whether to prove that it existed as such or that it did not, goes clean past the issue, which is, as I see it now, not about construing or dismantling contemporary notions of

Hinduism. Rather, it is of tracing *how* what we know as Hinduism today came about, what strategies were employed in the formative process, and finally in what way they differed from past ways of dealing with difference *within* what we know as Hinduism today, as much as *without*.

For, the nineteenth- and twentieth-century formulations of Hinduism differ in their dealings with pluralities; there seems to be a marked watershed at the turn of the twentieth century. Almost all nineteenth-century religious articulations of Hinduism feel constrained to deal with pluralities, to engage with them. And they do so from the perspective of belief, philosophical-metaphysical thought **(p.139)** and ritual practices, modes which are linked with older ways of engaging with difference. As reformist associations, Arya and Brahmo Samaj, the two major movements of the nineteenth century north of the Vindhyas, also differ from the twentieth-century approach, in that they expressly disengage their movements, the superiority of which they at all times proclaim, from Hinduism at large; they refer to themselves as 'samaj', or association. Arya Samaj is expressly denunciatory when it comes to other belief systems originating in the Indian peninsula. Whereas Brahmo Samaj, as far as I can make out, does not engage at length with any other mode of belief, though it does set itself off from what it takes to be traditional Hinduism. Rabindranath Tagore's famous novel *Gora* distinguishes between Brahmo and Hindu as late as 1910.

Traditionalist reformulations of Hinduism in the late nineteenth century, again following older modes, such as Harishchandra of Benares (1850–85), deal with all other Hinduistic belief systems, either by denying their validity or subsuming them.¹ But they engage with them, in the hope of either winning them over or at least proclaiming them to be inferior to them. And since they claim to be speaking from within the fold, they take it upon themselves to speak for *all* of Hinduism. Whether traditionalist or reformist, they adopt the modern philological/historical approach in citing authoritative Sanskrit texts to prove their point, to the extent that they have access to them or to the extent that they speak to them. It has become the accepted, the legitimated, way by the late nineteenth century. They are also modernizers in that in most cases (the Brahmo Samaj is an honourable exception) they link their particular notion of religion, faith, and societal order very closely with a textual corpus in a specific language (Sanskrit), with territory (Aryavarta), nation (Bharatavarsha), and very often with the new concept of race (Aryan).²

The twentieth-century mode as I see it, and once again there can be exceptions, articulates claims which are overarching, thus, **(p.140)** for instance, Vivekananda,³ Aurobindo, Gandhi, I would include the right-wing Hindu ideologue Savarkar here as well, perhaps Golwalkar, which subsumes differences without engaging with them, in most cases not even conceding them. The individual gurus can proclaim their own special ways to the godhead, but usually without denouncing other streams within Hinduism. They tend to

disregard inclusion/exclusion, thereby tacitly including themselves in the amorphous mass that contains other Hindus. To set themselves off from others within the Hindu fold would mean running the risk of being classed as merely another sect. Thus, they speak from within the mass, but also distinguish themselves from the mass by outlining their own position. However, they do so without engaging with other positions which may be as clearly outlined and may in fact contradict theirs. For, by the beginning of the twentieth century, West and East have agreed that Hinduism as an entity exists, whatever the quibbles about its exact formation and its exact beginning.

The early Arya Samaj, as founded by Dayanand Saraswati⁴ and as articulated in his programmatic work *Satyarth Prakash* (first edition, 1875, second revised edition, 1882),⁵ and Sanatana Dharma, or the Eternal Religion, as formulated by the Theosophists in *Sanatana Dharma: An Elementary Textbook of Hindu Religion and Ethics* (1903) (p.141) authored by Annie Besant (1847–1933) and Bhagavan Das (1869–1958), when juxtaposed with each other, beautifully illustrate the difference in approaches I speak of. The two associations are of great interest as a pair, not only because both were founded in 1875 but also because of their short lived alliance from 1878 on. They share some traits. Both adopted the newly popular notions of ‘Arya’ and ‘Aryavarta’ as keystones of their foundations; both were acquainted with Western Indological preoccupation with these. As Joan Leonard (1970) has shown, Dayanand was not only aware of this work, much of which he denounced in public, he had had contact with figures such as H.H. Wilson, Monier Williams, George Buehler, George Thibaut, and John Wilson, the last three were European Indologists teaching in India.⁶ Both societies would have a powerful impact on the subcontinent, also by virtue of the stress they laid on education of the young and the educational institutions they set up. Arya Samaj had the broader base; it was particularly effective because of the educational initiatives undertaken by its individual members and groups.⁷ The Theosophical Society would have an enormous impact on higher education in a site as key as the holy city of Benares. Besant’s Central Hindu College (1898) in the city would provide the nucleus for the later founding of the Benares Hindu University (1916).

However, whereas the Arya Samaj spread outside India later, reaching particularly the British colonies which housed indentured labour, the objects of the Theosophical Society were from the beginning conceived in global terms. They were, let us recall (the quotation is from the first circular by Colonel Olcott):

- (p.142) 1. ‘a serious attempt on the part of each member to study and develop his “inner psychic self”’;
2. ‘to oppose the materialism of science and every form of dogmatic theology, especially the Christian; to make known the facts about Oriental

religious philosophies, especially the pure esoteric teachings in the Vedas, and in the philosophies of the Buddha, Zoroaster and Confucius';
3. 'chiefly to aid in "the institution of the Brotherhood of Humanity, wherein all good and pure men will recognise each other as the equal effects (upon this planet) of One Uncreate, Universal, Infinite, and Everlasting Cause"'. (105)⁸

As Josephine Ransom in her *Short History of the Theosophical Society* further points out, '[T]he important words "the Brotherhood of Humanity" were here used for the first time. Also, this circular is noticeable for the absence of reference to Spiritualism, and Phenomena' (105). I go into these objects at some length, because spiritualism and phenomena would remain important, if subterranean forces, in the Theosophists' particular formulation of Hinduism, which they would see as *one* of the 'world religions' they sought to revive.⁹ Thus, even **(p.143)** as in the beginning of 1878, the society changed its name to The Theosophical Society of the Arya Samaj of India, recognizing Swami Dayanand as its chief, Colonel Henry Olcott, one of the two founders of the society—the other was Madame Blavatsky—was busy corresponding with several Buddhist priests of Sri Lanka (106). In short, the society was interested in setting up a network of global alliances. However, they did not always link up with the right partners in this enterprise. In the laconic words of Ransom (2007 [1938]): 'In August [1878] the Rules of the Arya Samaj arrived. It was clear the Samaj was not identical in character with The Society; but was instead a new Vedic sect of Hinduism. The Theosophical Society 'resumed its *status quo ante*' (108). H.P. Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott sent out two circulars during September. One defined the nature of The Theosophical Society, the other explained the nature of a new body—"The Theosophical Society of the Arya Samaj of Aryavart' (108). The latter organization lasted three to four years; it acted as a link between the two parent societies. Item four of a further circular of the society then read: 'The Society is in connection and sympathy with the Arya Samaj of Aryavart, one object of which Society is to elevate by a true spiritual education, mankind out of degenerate, idolatrous, and impure forms of worship wherever prevalent' (107). Dayanand Saraswati was no longer to be the one chief. He became a higher ranking member of the Occult hierarchy. 'At this time Swami Dayanand was regarded by the Founders as an "Adept of the Himalayan Brotherhood."' The occult hierarchy, variously constituted, is a complex structure; here it must suffice to say that an adept is third in rank, coming after the chief or planetary spirit and the *dhyanis*, those who have perfected the state of *dhyana* or contemplation¹⁰ Dayanand, it was announced to the American public, was the 'Supreme Chief of the Vedic Section of the **(p.144)** Eastern Division of The Theosophical Society'; his rank and learning were thereby outlined. In the metropolis of every country, there was to be a principal centre of the Arya Samaj, 'one of the biggest and most beneficent religio-philosophical fraternities ever organised' (119), as Colonel Olcott wrote to the *New York Sun*.

But the alliance even in this form could not be other than tempestuous and short lived. The different approaches of the two organizations and their split marked an important moment in the history of modern Hinduism, a watershed, as it were, between engaging with pluralities and superseding them. Let us then turn to these pluralities and the reasons why the Theosophists would very soon come to regard the Samaj as but a new Vedic sect of Hinduism (Ransom [1938] 2007, 108).¹¹

Dayanand Saraswati (1824–83) followed an old practice in declaring the Vedas to be the primeval text of the Aryas as he laid out what he saw to be its truth in his programmatic work *Satyarth Prakash*, or the *Light of Truth*. He saw himself constrained to devote a whole chapter, the eleventh, titled ‘An Examination of the Different Religions Prevailing in Aryavarta’, of his work to the theme as described in the chapter title.¹² This chapter is half the length of the sum of the ten chapters that precede it and twice as long as the three chapters that follow.¹³ Herein he applied the criteria he had set up in the course of **(p.145)** his work to judge and evaluate the different religions of Aryavarta. What were these criteria?

First, it was Sanskrit (VII, 237), the language in which the Veda was revealed to mankind. It was ‘the mother of all other languages’. Though it was no longer known to all, learning it required equal labour from ‘all countries and nations...’ (VII, 237). Second, he assessed all other religions of the subcontinent by virtue of their acknowledgement of the Vedas. The Vedas were revealed to ‘the first class (*jati*) of men, at the time of Creation’. The class originated in Tibet. The reference to Tibet was surely a sign of the short-lived union with the Theosophists. Later the class split into two: the good and the bad people. The good were Aryas, the bad, Dasyus. Aryas were once again divided into four classes: Brahmin and so on. When there was constant warfare between the Aryas and Dasyus, ‘the Aryas, regarding this country as the best on the whole earth, emigrated here and colonized it. For this reason it is called Aryavarta—the abode of the Aryas’ (264). This land of Aryavarta (Manu, 2, 22, 17) was bounded on the North by Himalayas, on the South by the Vindhya-chala, on the East and West by the sea (263). However, Dayanand Saraswati extended the boundaries of Aryavarta to the South: ‘All the countries included between the Himalaya on the north and the Vindhya-chal mountains on the South as far as Rameshwar are called Aryavarta, because they were colonized and inhabited by Devas (the learned) and Aryas—the good and the noble’.¹⁴ Closely related to the two criteria of Sanskrit and the Vedas, of language and scripture, are then the notion of Arya, the people, and Aryavarta, the territory they came to inhabit.

The Aryas had once ruled over the whole world as the supreme power over non-Aryans. ‘Since the beginning of the world till 5,000 years back, the Aryas were the sovereign rulers of the whole earth, in other words, there was only one

paramount power whose suzerainty was acknowledged by the rulers of the earth' (XI, 329).

'All the knowledge that is extant in the world originated in Aryavarta'. Thence it spread to Europe, thence to Greece, thence to the whole continent of Europe, thence to America and other countries. **(p.146)** Even today, India heads all other countries in matters of Sanskrit learning.

The impression that the Germans are the best Sanskrit scholars and that no one has read so much Sanskrit as Professor Max Mueller is altogether unfounded. ... The study of Sanskrit being almost non-existent in Europe, German scholars like Professor Max Mueller, who have read a little Sanskrit may have come to be regarded as the highest authorities in Germany but compared to India, the number of Sanskrit scholars in that country is very small. (XI, 332)

Five thousand years ago there was no religion (*mata*) apart from Vedic mata. The reason the Vedas came not to prevail everywhere was the Mahabharata war. Thereafter, there arose four belief systems in opposition to the Vedic: Purani, Jaini, Kirani, and Qurani! Thus, there came to be a proliferation of faiths. Apart from the Vedas, Dayanand recognized *Manusmriti* and the two epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, as canonical for the Aryas.

Dayanand was savage in his denunciation of Brahmins, whom he consistently addressed as 'Popeji'. They did not deserve to be called Brahmins. They had no hot line to heaven, enjoyed no divine authority, no person could be Brahmin simply by birth. 'The word pope [he tells us] originally meant father in Latin, but here this term is applied to a person who robs another through fraud and hypocrisy and achieves his selfish end'. The Brahmins thus enjoyed no special authority. We need to recall that Dayanand was opening up Sanskrit learning, and the knowledge of the Veda, potentially to all castes and of course to women. This was a radical step for his time.

He explicitly rejected the Puranas.¹⁵

They are mostly false but there may be a thing here and there that is true, but that is taken from the Vedas and the Shastras while that which is false is the invention of the popes. In the Shiva Purana, Shiva is described as the Lord of all, while Vishnu, Brahma, Indra, Ganesha, and Surya are spoken of as his servants, whilst in the Vishnu Purana, Vishnu has been held as the Supreme Spirit and Shiva and the other **(p.147)** gods as his servants. Again in the Devi Purana, Devi is described as the Supreme Deity and Shiva, Vishnu, and the like as her servants. In Ganesha Khand, Ganesh is called the Lord of all while the other gods are his servants. Why, if this is not the invention of the sectarian priests, whose else could it be? Such self-contradictions are not possible even in the writings of an ordinary man,

leave alone a learned man ... These books should appropriately be termed *navina* or new. The contents of the Puranas bear on them the stamp of the internecine warfare of these sects. (363)

He reserved special ire for the *Bhagavata Purana*:

Now the life-sketch of Krishna given in the *Mahabharat* is very good. His nature, attributes, character, and life-history are all like that of an apta. Nothing is written therein that would go to show that he committed any sinful act during his whole life, but the author of the *Bhagavata* has attributed to him as many vices and sinful practices as he could. (414)

Jaina or Baudhha mata were 'mahabhayankar vedashastradi ka nindak', that is, most frightful, slanderers of the Vedas and the Shastras (426). The Buddhists and Jains did not know the Veda; they simply chose to believe what the Popes said about it. Jains and Vaishnavas, two formidable opponents for a former Shaiva from Gujarat, were the worst of the lot. He accused the Jains of inventing idols and temple worship.

In spite of the efforts of the popes, their disciples continued their visits to the temples of the Jainis, they even began to attend Jain meetings wherein passages from the Jain scriptures were recited ... The Puranic popes then bethought of themselves that unless they devised some means to stem the tide of conversion, their disciples would become Jainis. Upon this the Puranic popes by mutual consultation came to the conclusion that like the Jainis, they should also have their incarnations, temples, images and mythological books (*katha ki pustak*). (362)

And in one breath, he denounced all three, Jains, Vaishnavas, and Shaktas. The Shaktas he associated closely with the Jains. There could obviously be no separate place for Tantriks of any kind.

Idol worship, pilgrimage, and funerary rites such as *sraddha* connected with Puranic religions, as also astrology, were in any case inventions of the popes.

(p.148) The truth is that the popes trade upon the credulity of unsophisticated people like you. There is not a single word in the Veda to support idol worship and the belief that God can be summoned and bidden to depart (at the will of the devotee). (375)

That ascetic *siddhas* and *sannyasis* had no space in his scheme of things is understandable. But Kabir, Nanak, and Dadu, poet-saints who had risen from the people, were also given short shrift. They had no knowledge of Sanskrit. Kabir 'spoke ill of the Vedas, the Shastras and the Pundits. Some ignorant weavers were ensnared by his net' (442). Nanak came in for censure as well but also for some praise.

The aim of Nanak was, no doubt, good; but he did not possess any learning and was merely acquainted with the dialect of the (Punjabi) villagers among whom he was born. He was quite ignorant of the Vedas and the Shastras and of Sanskrit. ... It is true that in Nanak's time, the Punjab was altogether destitute of Sanskrit learning and was groaning under the tyranny of the Mohammedans. He did keep some persons from embracing Mohammedanism. (443-4)

What of the newer religions with their strong social reform constituent? Brahmo and Prarthana Samaj, he tells us,

are not altogether good, since it is impossible that the work of men ignorant of the Vedas could ever be altogether good ... Let alone speaking well of the Vedas and the Shastras, they have not even kept aloof from speaking ill of them. In the sacred books of the Brahmo Samaj, the names of Christ, Moses, Muhammad, Nanak, Chaitanya are mentioned in the list of holy men but not a single name from amongst the sages and seers of the past. (467)

Their good points are: '1) They have saved a small number of people from embracing Christianity. 2) They have helped to abolish idolatry to some extent. 3) They have freed people from the shackles of false books' (467). But they were devoid of patriotism (*svadesh bhakti*) and imitated the Christians in many things, even altering the rules and regulations governing marriage and eating and drinking with others. Dayanand did allow that the Europeans had good points; they were progressive in their social observances—they had no child marriage and so on, they promoted education for girls as well as boys, they advocated the right to choose a life partner, they believed in public **(p.149)** debate, love of the nation, and the readiness to sacrifice everything for it, they were active, not indolent, and so on.

They allow boots and shoes made in their own country (or those made after their pattern in this country) to be taken into courts and offices, but never Indian shoes. This must suffice to convince you that they value their boots much more than they do the natives of many other countries. (469)

It then stood to reason that the Arya Samaj towered above the rest:

Hence if you are anxious for the advancement of your country, you would do well to join the Arya Samaj and conduct yourselves in accordance with its aims and objects. Otherwise, you (will simply waste your lives) and gain nothing in the end. (475)

The forceful, colloquial oratory of Dayanand, his rough rhetoric, and his violent denunciations, illustrated by anecdotes, which are enacted as scenes, are lost in English translation. However, his very savagery is an indication of the presence

of all these religious traditions at the fairs and riverbanks where he himself engaged in direct address and debate.

Wilhelm Halbfass in his remarkable work *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (1988) has commented on the turn of events I now turn to. He says,

[W]hat is remarkable is the manner in which the new self-representation of Hinduism which grew out of its encounter with the West was in turn taken up by the West. Here particular mention must be made of Annie Besant, the leader of the Theosophical movement, who went to India in 1893 (the same year in which Vivekananda attended the 'World Parliament of Religions' in Chicago) and played a decisive part in the founding of the nationalist Central Hindu College in Benares. In this connection, she also gained great influence in shaping the 'sanatana-dharma-text-books' which later spread throughout India. All of the previous attempts to catechetically fix and systematically teach the *sanatanadharma* were surpassed by the practical and organizational efficiency of this undertaking. (344-5)

But this is only a partial account of a process which was much more collaborative, between a modern traditionalist from Benares, Lala Bhagavan Das, who supplied the bulk of the material and Annie Besant who welded it into a compact whole. She produced the 'running (p.150) text' we are told, in the brief span of two months, while vacationing in Kashmir from mid-May to mid-July 1901. Lala Bhagavan Das was also present in Kashmir, a fact overlooked in the society's account. It took a further 2 years to work out the final text of the catechism.

Sanatana Dharma. An Elementary Textbook of Hindu Religion and Ethics was produced first. It was published anonymously in February 1903. Once the format was worked out, the more extensive *Advanced Textbook* could be produced in a matter of months; it came out in July 1903. It took a further two years to work out the final text of the much shorter catechism. 'The third still smaller abstract, *Hindu or Sanatana-Dharma Catechism* in English, was in the shape of questions and answers for the use of small boys'.¹⁶ It is the last of the set of three.¹⁷ Besant saw the three textbooks as a major step 'towards organizing and systematizing Hindu religious and moral instruction throughout India'.¹⁸

The idea of a catechism for the tuition of Hindu children had been broached as early as 1883 by Colonel Olcott, in connection with Hindu Sunday schools which he had wanted to call into being. We have to recall that his *Buddhist Catechism* (1881) had been a great success in Sri Lanka or Ceylon as it was called then. It was regarded as authoritative and used in law cases: 'The *Catechism* has become a classic...', as Ransom tells us (159).

It is worth noting that the Sanskrit term *dharma* was translated as and equated with religion by modern Indian thinkers, following the Christian missionary usage. It included ethics in the modern sense **(p.151)** but it also reflected the older understanding of *dharma* as norms formally laid down for individual castes, regions, and stages of life.¹⁹ As Wilhelm Halbfass, following the German Indologist Paul Hacker, has pointed out, the Vaishnavas, with some stretch of the imagination, the reference is to the *Bhagavad Gita* above all, could be said to have included ethics as part of their understanding of *dharma*. But this inclusion of ethics as part of religion was ‘not one based on the philosophy of identity’ in the modern individualistic sense. This individualistic sense was inserted in modern Indian thinking, amongst others, by Vivekananda (Halbfass 1988, 239). In the role that the *Bhagavad Gita* played here and in the role of Vaishnava ethics we can see the possible Vaishnava-inflected influence of Bhagavan Das.²⁰ For, **(p.152)** two streams flow together in *The Elementary Text Book*, the Sanatana Dharma of late nineteenth-century Benares, with Vaishnavism as the unspoken core, and the Theosophical understanding of religion. As in the *Bhagavad Gita*, he and Besant preserved the *varnashrama dharma*, that is, the four-caste-hierarchy frame offered in the *Manusmriti*, not questioning it, though discreetly loosening the boundaries, and universalizing the qualities supposed to be inherent in the individual *varnas* and life stages, as applicable also to those who were not expressly part of the varna system.

The Elementary Text Book forms the base of my analysis.²¹ It is a masterly text, worth the tribute paid to it by Wilhelm Halbfass. Besant’s running text flows lightly. The individual chapters, always held brief, contain Sanskrit terms in Devanagari printed in bold, which are largely left unexplained. They are glossed sometimes at the beginning of a given chapter. Either a familiarity with them is assumed or they are to become familiar with time. We need to recall that the term *sanatana*, eternal, came into currency in the nineteenth century in direct opposition to the new associations being formed, in particular the Arya Samaj with its immense popularity in the Panjab.²² That the term ‘sanatana’ was used in the Theosophical catechism, rather than **(p.153)** Hindu or even Arya, was surely due to Bhagavan Das’s preference for the term, as standing for the traditionalist core of Hindu thought, rather than any predilection that Annie Besant brought with her.

The contribution of Bhagavan Das to this work seems to have been substantial for he was acknowledged as an author along with Besant, when the textbooks began to appear with author names. Though Bhagavan Das’s role was often underplayed, the printed catalogues of the Theosophical Publishing House often simply omit his name.²³ He did not participate in the Theosophical belief in and practice of the occult, though that did not affect his close cooperation and work with Annie Besant.²⁴ Harishchandra had formulated his version of Sanatana Dharma by linking Vaishnavata or Vaishnavism with Bharatavarsha or India at large. But Bhagavandas, also from an extremely wealthy and well-known

merchant family of Benares, linked with Harishchandra's, though clearly Vaishnava in his orientation, was offering a yet wider view, which utterly subsumed difference. He was surely well acquainted with Orientalist approaches, though the Orientalists are nowhere cited in this text, either to substantiate or refute a claim. He was also deeply nationalist; he would later go on to head the UP Congress Party and after Independence become the first Indian to be awarded the Bharat Ratna. He and Besant preserved the varanashrama dharma frame offered in the *Manusmriti*, not questioning it, though discreetly loosening the boundaries, and **(p.154)** universalizing—as applicable to also to those not expressly a part of it—the qualities supposed to be inherent in the individual varnas and life stages.

I turn now to the text. It consists of 275 pages, printed in large font. As the introduction tells us,

Sanatana-Dharma means the Eternal Religion, the Ancient Law, and it is based on the Vedas, sacred books given to men many long years ago. This Religion has also been called the Aryan Religion, because it is Religion that was given to the first nation of the Aryan Race; Aryan means noble, and the name was given to a great race, much finer in character and appearance than the races which went before it in the world's history...

The land they inhabit stretches

from the eastern ocean to the western ocean, between the two mountains (Himavat and Vindhya), the wise call Aryavarta. (3)

In later portions of the work, the peninsula is simply added to Aryavarta, without any further explanation.

In later days the Religion was called the Hindu Religion, and this is the name by which it is now usually known. It is the oldest of living Religions, and no other Religion has produced so many great men – great teachers, great writers, great sages, great saints, great kings, great warriors, great statesmen, great benefactors, great patriots. (4)

It is based on the Vedas, with their tripartite division into mantra, Brahmana, and Upanishad, but also on the Smriti, for no part of the Smriti is disclaimed and disqualified. This last is the great difference from the Arya Samaj, which rejected large portions of the Smriti. The Sruti, that is the four Vedas, was received from the devas by very wise men. As for Smriti, the later Dharmasastras, the Puranas, and the epics, the authors proclaim: 'The first of these is the chief compendium of Aryan Law, Manu being the great Law-giver of the race'. The Hindu chronology of the *yugas*, or cycles, of time are introduced (7). The Puranas are explained as stories and allegories composed for the use of the 'less learned part of the nation, especially for those who could not study the

Vedas'. *Itihasa*, of course, consists of the two great epics: the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. The science (the six *angas*, literally limbs) of the Vedas 'comprise what we now call secular knowledge. In the old days religious and secular knowledge were **(p.155)** not divided'. This last is important, for this is also a Theosophical claim—they are a religio-philosophical society and their spiritualism is a science, thus merging their own notion of science with the Vedic *angas*, or branches of learning, though without further clarifying their relationship.

The chapters conclude with Sanskrit *shlokas* reproduced once again in Devanagari. Most *shlokas* are taken from the *Bhagavad Gita* and from *Manusmriti*, but they are also from the best-known Upanishads and sometimes from the Puranas, chiefly from the *Bhagavata* and *Vishnu*. The fact that these last two Puranas, both of which are classic Vaishnava texts, are so frequently cited can once again be attributed to the contribution of Bhagavan Das. The *shlokas* are translated into simple English. The translations bear closer analysis, for they bring in Theosophical terminology without in any way emphasizing this fact. The term *Mahatma*, for instance, used often in *Bhagavad Gita* citations begins with a capital 'M', thus referring unobtrusively but surely to the Mahatma of the Theosophical pantheon. *Ahimsa* is translated as harmlessness, rather than non-violence.

The illustrative tales which dot the running text are attractively, even movingly, told. They are drawn for the most part from the *Mahabharata*, largely from the 'Shanti parvan'—Bhisma is a towering figure—some from the 'Vana' and 'Sabha Parvan-s', less so from Valmiki's *Ramayana*. The ethical chapters abound with these illustrative tales. In fact, they consist largely of them.

The six philosophical systems are briefly explained. When speaking of yoga, there is once again a touch of Theosophy:

The Yoga says that as there are now generally known five senses and five organs of action, so there are other subtler senses and organs; and explain more fully how they may be developed by men who are seeking to know God, who is their own true innermost spirit. (10-11)

Part I, 'Basic Hindu Religious Ideas', is kept brief. It consists of 74 pages, less than a quarter of the whole. The chapters of this first section have unexceptional titles: 'The One Existence', 'The Many', 'Re-birth', 'Karma', 'Sacrifice', and 'The Worlds—Visible and Invisible'. Chapter 3, 'Rebirth', allows space for the lives in between death and rebirth. The *jiva* is 'a portion of Brahman' (34). He evolves from minerals, through plants, shrubs, trees, animals, to human form:

(p.156) The student may ask: What makes the forms evolve to suit the *Jiva*? The *Jiva*'s own efforts. He wants to look out through the walls that encloses him; he tries to see, and his outward energy works on the wall,

and slowly, very very slowly, evolves an eye, and so with all the senses and organs ... and the Deva-s help him by giving him materials that are suited to the organ he wants to build. (36-7)

The term used is 'jiva' rather than 'atman', since this allows a merging with the Theosophical notion of visible and invisible bodies. The text of the last chapter, 'The Worlds—Visible and Invisible', is especially porous. It allowed for an effortless integration of the occult for those initiated into Theosophical thought and practice. For the others, it could read harmlessly as speaking of the world of the dead, of the ancestors, and the existence in between the worlds, detailed so extensively in the *Garuda Purana*, from which a single shloka is cited at the conclusion of the chapter 'Shraddha'.

Part II, 'General Hindu Religious Customs and Rites', is also held to a brief 44 pages; it is the shortest, for here differences could easily arise. It follows *Manusmriti* in the definition of dharma as determined by the samskaras, or life-cycle, rituals and so on. Samskara ceremonies make use of material objects chosen for their good magnetism. The devas, we are told, share in this magnetism (75), and the sounds of the mantras and their vibrations drive away hostile intelligences and bad magnetic influences. The very process of translation allows for latitude, and makes possible at least two readings, one for the Theosophically initiated and one for the uninitiated. Since this section largely retains Sanskrit terminology, when other terms are used, it is difficult to gauge whether they are simply loosely translated or just imported. Chapter 3, 'Saucham', 'consists of the rules laid down for keeping bodily purity, and thus ensuring physical health and strength' (84).

The visible body, the Anna-maya-kosa, is composed of particles drawn from the food we eat, the liquids we drink, the air we breathe [so far so good, but now-] and from a constant rain of minute particles, too tiny for us to see, that falls upon us continually from the people and the things around us. This last statement may sound a little strange but it is true. (84)

The explication thereafter uses a series of scientific sounding terms: atoms, microbes, and so on which sound perfectly reasonable and acceptable as such.

(p.157) The chapters 'Samskaras', 'Sraddha' (Funerary Rites), 'Saucham' (Purification Processes) present notions which would be largely unacceptable to the Arya Samaj, but the terms used are so general that they offer little offence even to those who would want to reject them.

We see this in the approach generally followed, which makes unexceptional first to then go on to make exceptional, as, for instance, in Chapter 6, where the four ashramas are introduced. They simply reflect the successive life stages of man, but

(n)ations have characteristics, just as have individuals, and among the characteristics of the Hindu nation in old days were order and balance. The Sanatana-dharma stamped these characteristics on the people, and thus shaped a very dignified type of man, evenly developed and well balanced ... The large view of life taken in the Veda-s is the root of these characteristics. (102)

Chapter 7 comes then to the sensitive topic of the four castes. An ingenious explanation is developed to rationalize the four castes, which are linked in reverse order to the four stages of life. As the authors point out, in the course of the long pilgrimage of the Jivatman through many births, there are four distinctly marked stages, called of old Varna-s, or colours. These according to Manu are recognized as distinct social classes, or castes. This seems unexceptional, but here follows the deflection into wider realms. These stages are universal, all Jivatman-s passing through them; the peculiarity of the Sanatana-dharma is that it has made them the framework of its social polity. In short, it is not in itself peculiar to Hindus, but Hindus have made it their peculiarity. How, we will see.

In the early days the outer caste coincided with the stages: Jivatmans at each stage were born into bodies belonging to that stage, and the whole of society was contented and progressive. But in these later days ... *varnasamkara*, caste-confusion, has come on Aryavarta and her whole peninsula. Jivatmans at each stage are being born into bodies of other stages, and hence, as surely as content and progress arose out of the harmony of elder days, do disorder and stagnation arise out of the disharmony of the present. (112)

Childhood is thus the fourth or Sudra caste.

(p.158) We have said there are four stages. The first is that which includes the infancy, childhood and youth of the Jivatman; he is unfolding youthful virtues, developing obedience, serviceableness, patience; he has few responsibilities; his duties may be summed up in the word: Service. Where there is no caste-confusion, such Jivatmans are born into the lower social stratum; they are labourers, artisans, servants, manual workers of every kind. (113)

If each caste member could keep to the characteristics of the caste allotted to him, there would ensue '... a happier state of things; he can diligently practise the virtues characteristic of his caste, and avoid pride, vanity, and grasping at privileges' (115-16). If one accepts the respective castes as stages in the life of the *jivatman*, or soul, what rational argument could one bring against what is a very systematic and sound division?

However, in looking for what is common to all Hindu formations, the hierarchies inherent in the caste system come to be accepted as the status quo with little or no room left for the mobility of the lower, leave alone the untouchables. All in all, the Theosophical understanding of the matter seems excessively conservative as compared to the dynamism of the Arya Samaj.

The third and final part, 'Ethical Teachings', is the longest and also the most attractive to read. It consists of 142 pages, almost half the book. Not surprisingly, tales play a large role in this section. The chapters have titles well worth taking note of: 'Ethical Science'; 'What It Is'; 'The Foundation of Ethics as Given by Religion'; 'Right and Wrong'—here Varnashrama Dharma is brought in again in broad and sweeping terms; and 'The Standard of Ethics'. Three chapters 'Virtues and Their Foundations', 'Bliss and Emotions', and 'Self-Regarding Virtues' are devoted to virtues as relating to superiors, others relating to equals, and inferiors. These last chapters relate not only to people who are older, those who are of the same age, and younger people (ashramas) but also refer to those with higher, equal, and lower standing (varnas). The language used is so cautious, the terms so large and overarching, that though largely conservative, even Brahminical in its orientation, in the generosity of the terms the work uses, and the interpretation of the tales from the epics, it almost sounds progressive.

(p.159) The foreword from the later *Advanced Text-Book*²⁵ emphasizes most clearly the overarching nature of the enterprise, and in concluding this section, I would like to cite it.

The Board of Trustees of the Central Hindu College has laid down the following principles to regulate the religions and moral teaching in all its institutions. The Object is to combine Hindu religious and ethical training with western education needed for the time. This training shall be wide, liberal and unsectarian, yet definitely and distinctively Hindu. It must be inclusive enough to unite the most divergent forms of Hindu thought, but exclude non-Hindu forms of thought. It must: avoid all doctrines of controversy between recognized orthodox schools...That which unites Hindus in a common faith must be clearly and simply taught: all that divides must be ignored. Lastly, care must be taken to cultivate tolerance towards differences of thought and practice among Hindus, and also differences of religion among non-Hindus, revering all faiths as varying roads to approach the Supreme...May this book help build up the national religion and pave the way to national happiness and prosperity. (ix)

Thus, the results of the co-operation between a heterodox, anti-church, but nonetheless racist, fringe position, which the Theosophical surely is, and what I like to call enlightened traditionalism, that of Lala Bhagvan Das, make possible a text which is both esoteric/exoteric, usable by a secret society while reaching

out to all Hindus and claiming to be all-enveloping. The samskaras, the retention of the caste system without even engaging with the untouchables, the reference to ritual worship, and some citations from the Puranas would have established clear differences from the creed professed by the Arya Samaj though they would have been acceptable to most Hindu formations. Surely in itself an extraordinary feat! Though the text ceased to be used in the Central Hindu College after it merged with the Benaras Hindu University in 1916, according to Halbfass, it was used widely in the country, and the *Catechism* was even translated into **(p. 160)** other Indian languages. Further, the Theosophical example continued to inspire similar works on the kind of unitary Hinduism posited by them (Halbfass 1988, 345).

The Elementary Text Book of Hinduism for all its openness then also presents a closed system. It glosses over all difference within Hinduism, and even as it asks for tolerance towards all religions, it positions them as entirely outside Hinduism. This is the great difference from Gandhi's approach to Hinduism. He too has his own unitary view, but it is not high Brahminical; it has popular devotional or Bhakti underpinnings and it acknowledges difference from Islam, while at the same time extending friendship.

But to return to the pluralities—as long as the Other is being addressed, being denigrated, talked to, scolded, and in the older mode that is the case, there is less need of an Other who is entirely outside Hindu streams. Dayanand is, if at all, only a little more vicious when speaking of Islam and Christianity than he is when speaking of the many streams within the Hindu fold. Once no Other is recognized in the field of faiths of Indic origin, which, as we saw, teem with plurality, this Other surely has to be placed outside, if nothing else, than in order to unite the field? Vinayak Damodar Savarkar had recognized this clearly in his time:

Nothing can weld peoples into a nation and nations into a state as the pressure of a common foe. Hatred separates as well as unites.²⁶

As a postscript, we need to, of course, take note of the developments within Hinduism in the first decades of the twentieth century which made for a closing of ranks of the most radically different Hindu formations. I rehearse some well-known facts here, in order to recall the changes that took place then. Many factors played into this process, most of them political. For one thing, the preparations for the 1911 census brought into sharp focus the fuzzy contours of Hinduism. Given the plurality of Hindu formations, it could hardly be otherwise. Census Commissioner E.A. Gait published a note in **(p.161)** the *Lahore Tribune* in November 1910 outlining the difficulties census officers faced in deciding whether a person was to be denominated as Hindu or not. Gait suggested the development of a set of questions regarding the gods worshipped, temple entry, and attitude towards untouchability as criteria. The last was a particularly

sensitive issue. If caste Hindus did not recognize the untouchables, did not touch them, were they to be seen as Hindus? Hindus stood to lose a vast number of their unfortunate brethren. This set off a furious debate—so much so that Gait had to withdraw the note—as also the publication of the results of the 1911 census, where in certain areas of the subcontinent the Hindus were shown to be declining in number. Colonel U. Mukherji of the Indian Medical Service had already published a much-discussed pamphlet *Hindus—A Dying Race* in 1909. He had calculated that in a little more than 400 years, the Hindus faced the prospect of being wiped off the face of the earth.²⁷

Swami Shraddhanand (1857–1926), the charismatic Arya Samaj leader, was at the forefront of the rush to reclaim converted Hindus through *shuddhi*, the Samaj's purification programme. Orthodox Hindu forces joined with the Samaj in trying to reconvert amongst others the nominally Muslim Malkana Rajputs of the western United Provinces. More controversial was the attempt to apply *shuddhi* to the many untouchables, who were given caste status. It was getting to a numbers game. Further incentive to Hindu consolidation and communal polarization was provided by the Morley–Minto Reforms of 1909, which gave Muslims separate electorates for the legislative assembly elections, thereby virtually creating a default Hindu constituency. The Muslim mobilization around Khilafat in the early 1920s made for temporary solidarity between Muslims and Hindus under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, but this state of affairs was not destined to last long, nor to prevent the polarization that had already set in. As Gyanendra Pandey has shown, it was in the 1920s that the word 'communal' first gained currency in the subcontinent.²⁸

(p.162) In retrospect then, the programmatic formulations of nineteenth-century Hindu formations could only seem suspect to the twentieth century, which expected a more global approach in articulating tenets of belief. Gandhi was to criticize roundly what he saw as the narrowness of the Arya Samaj. In a long article for the *Young India* issue of 29 May 1925, he wrote:

Wherever you find Arya Samajists, there is life and energy. But having the narrow outlook and a pugnacious habit, they either quarrel with people of other denominations or failing that, with one another.²⁹

The consolidating Hindu formulations of the twentieth century saw the exclusivism of the nineteenth century not as the enthusiastic outpouring of one newly evolving stream out of many, as which we must view the emergent Arya Samaj, but as essentially constricting. The time for engaging with pluralities was now past. In this changing environment, the articulation of Sanatana Dharma as all that unified Hindus and as pioneered by the Theosophists could only gather more momentum and gain yet more political ground.

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(p.163) Godwin, Joscelyn, 1994. *The Theosophical Enlightenment*. Albany (NY): State University of New York Press.

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(p.164) Viswanathan, Gauri. 2000. 'The Ordinary Business of Occultism'. *Critical Inquiry* 27 (1): 1–20.

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Notes:

⁽¹⁾ For a detailed discussion of the theme, see the chapter 'The Only Real Religion of the Hindus', in my monograph on Harischandra, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bharatendu Harischandra and Nineteenth Century Banaras* (1997; 2010, 338–429).

⁽²⁾ See Leonard (1970) for a discussion of the racist connotations of this term from the late nineteenth century on.

(³) Jyotirmaya Sharma has shown how Vivekananda deals with difference within the Hindu stream, which he tends to equate with India at large. He acknowledges that they exist, however he subsumes them first by maintaining that they all acknowledge the Veda, and second by seeing them as part of the successive stages.

In establishing the sovereign authority of Vedanta, Vivekananda posits three stages in the spiritual growth of every individual. These three stages correspond to the evolution of all other faiths. The Vedanta, he argues, contains and reflects all these three stages. It is a process of evolution, beginning with Dvaita or Dualism, Vishishtadvaita, or qualified Monism and Advaita or absolute Monism ... Vivekananda dismisses Jainism and Buddhism as mere clones of Vedanta. ([2013] 2014, 230)

See also pages 163 and 209.

(⁴) J.T.F. Jordens's classic work *Dayanand Saraswati. His Life and Ideas* (1978) remains the best account of his life and works.

(⁵) See J.T.F. Jordens's essay on the first and second edition of the work (1972) for the changes made in the second.

(⁶) Joan Leonard begins her essay 'Aryan Theory of Race' by citing a passage from Henry Olcott written for the journal *The Theosophist* in March 1881. Here I cite just the two opening sentences: 'The theory that Aryavarta [N.W. India] was the cradle of European civilization, the Aryans the progenitors of Western peoples, and their literature the source and spring of all Western religions and philosophies is comparatively a thing of yesterday. Professor Max Mueller and a few other Sanskritists have been bringing about this change in Western ideas...' (1970, 271). For information on Dayanand's contact with Western Indologists, see (1970, 288).

(⁷) See the classic study by Kenneth Jones on the rapid spread of the Arya Samaj in the *Panjab: Arya Dharm: Hindu Consciousness in 19th-Century Punjab* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press; Delhi: Manohar, 1976).

(⁸) Ransom [1938] 2007, citations of page numbers from this text within the text given above.

(⁹) There is a fair amount of literature on the term 'world religion', including the book-length study *The Invention of World Religions* by Masuzawa (2005). Though the term has come to be widely used all over the world, and not only in the classrooms of the United States, its problematic nature remains, since the classification continues to be 'group-tied' however transcultural and transnational the groups. In speaking of a particularly popular school text on

Hinduism, Timothy Fitzgerald (1990) in his short article 'Hinduism and the "World Religion" Fallacy', points out the problems the term brings with itself: 'Virtually everything that sociology has revealed about Hinduism is ignored in the quest for a soteriological belief system, a "World Religion", which transcends any particular social group. In other words, the fundamental sense in which Hinduism is group-tied is ignored' (1990, 111). Yet, in some contexts, as the Neo-Vedantin or Theosophical, the term seems valid enough, for these groups are precisely trying to transcend caste. 'Such sectarian viewpoints with their 'universal' soteriologies are one important part of the studying of Hinduism, but it is a distortion to present them as identical with the subject. Perhaps a lot of Hindus have little familiarity with these viewpoints and their propagators' (112).

(¹⁰) At the head of the occult hierarchy, as deduced from various publications of the society, there is the chief or planetary spirit, 'to become one of which is open to every purified Ego...' The omnipresent universal spirit is the temple of nature. To know this is the goal of evolution. Then come the dhyanis as collective host. Then come the adepts, who come through the human, man, or thinking process. After the adepts come the arhats in descending order. Then comes initiates of three other grades and lastly accepted are probationary pupils or *chelas* (summarized from the prose of Ransom [1938] 2007, 44-5).

(¹¹) The many streams of Hinduism would remain problematic for most universalist ideologues, such as those of the Hindu Right, for instance. As John Zavos in his book *The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in India* (2000) has noted, for right-wing organizations, such as the Hindu Mahasabha, the chronic disunity among the Hindus was the real threat rather than Muslims at large (149).

(¹²) Dayanand Saraswati, *Light of Truth*, English Translation of *Satyarth Prakash* by Chiranjiva Bharadwaja (Delhi: Sarvadeshik Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, 1984). Hereafter citations of chapter and page included in the text given above.

Jyotirmaya Sharma has also treated the eleventh chapter of *Satyarth Prakash* in his book *Hindutva; Exploring the Idea of Hindu Nationalism* ([2003] 2015, 37-45), though with very different aims in mind, that of showing the exclusive nature of the faith Dayanand is preaching. The aim of the present chapter is to show that Dayanand engages with the plurality of faiths he encounters, thus affirming their presence.

(¹³) The three chapters that follow treat the non-Hindu religions of the subcontinent. The twelfth chapter deals with the Charavaka, Buddhist, and Jain religions, thirteen with Christianity, and fourteen with Islam.

(¹⁴) It was uninhabited before they came. No Sanskrit work speaks of any original inhabitants nor of the fact that the Aryans came from Iran. Since there

were no original inhabitants, there were no Dravidians, though Dayanand does not specifically mention them (265).

(¹⁵) The Theosophists integrated the Puranas in their scheme of things, as we will see.

(¹⁶) The *History of Sanatana Dharma*, as clarified above, consisted of a set of three text-books compiled from material supplied by Dr Bhagavan Das. *The Catechism* was a yet shorter form, designed for the school use of boys, who were expected to learn it by heart.

(¹⁷) The *Sanatana-Dharma Catechism: A Catechism for Boys and Girls in Hindu Religion and Ethics* is a short text of nineteen pages. As Hawley (2009, 332n14) notes, the *Catechism* is likely to have had very wide distribution. It was translated into Gujarati, Hindi, Marathi, Bengali, Urdu, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam, and Sindhi. It was short and pithy. The answer to the very first question, for instance, is 'Sanatana means eternal: Dharma means religion'. The Hindu religion is described as 'the oldest in the world' and so on.

(¹⁸) In *Central Hindu College Magazine* (1 January 1903, 3), cited in Kumar (2001, 139).

(¹⁹) As Halbfass points out, 'In general, the role of ethics is central for the self understanding and self-articulation of modern Hindu thought' (1988, 241).

(²⁰) Dr Bhagavan Das (1869–1958) is remembered by his son Sri Prakasa in an affectionate memoir (1970) from whence is drawn the information that follows. The family had extremely wealthy forebears, who had collaborated with and financed the East India Company in their southern wars, also the one with Tipu Sultan, later they had settled in Benares, carrying on banking and insurance business. The family had once belonged to the Vallabha sampradaya, later it shifted its allegiance to another Vaishnava sampradaya, that of Ramanuja in the south. Educated in his childhood by a maulvi in Persian and Urdu, Bhagavan Das was also well versed in Sanskrit and English. He went to the city's famous Queen's College for his bachelor's and master's degree, that being the highest academic degree then available. The doctorate was an honorary degree granted later by the Allahabad University.

The English educated were attracted to the society for its progressive ideas. Bhagavan Das became a member of the Theosophical Society at the early age of sixteen and remained there till the end of his days. He early acquired a reputation for learning, working closely with Annie Besant on her work for the Theosophical Society and the Central Hindu College, which she established in 1898, the year he resigned work as a government servant after eight years of service. Thereafter, he settled in Benares in the family house. In summer 1901, he went to Kashmir with Annie Besant and co-wrote the *Sanatana-Dharma*

textbooks, primarily for the students of the Hindu College, where he himself taught religion. Besant acquired her knowledge of Hindu scripture largely through the mediation of Bhagavan Das. Of his many books, *The Essential Unity of All Religions* [1932] 1955 is the best known. On the preference of the term 'Sanatana Dharma' rather than 'Hindu', see page 37 of the memoir.

(²¹) The text from which I cite was published in 1914–15, when Annie Besant was president of the trustees board of Central Hindu College. The chapter on Purusharthas was added later and stemmed in its entirety from the pen of Dr Bhagavan Das. John S. Hawley has also analysed this text briefly in a 2009 essay as also another school text, Pandit Gurusahay's *Sanatanadharmamartanda* published in Hindi in 1878. Hawley is interested in showing that Sanatana Dharma as we know it today was a creation of many hands in the late nineteenth century, amongst others of these two texts in English and Hindi respectively. His analysis is therefore briefer than mine, and focused upon the strategies followed by Besant, some of them influenced by Christianity, in encapsulating such complex material in such a handy and skilful way. Hawley also tells us that the *Elementary Textbook* sold 130,000 copies in the first four years of its life (2009, 315). And as I can vouch from my own experience, it is still kept in print by the Theosophical Society.

(²²) The term 'sanatana' as also similar words also knew an older usage. But, as Halbfass points out, 'Before the encounter with the West, they were not used as self-descriptions of Hinduism in the face of other religions to characterize Hinduisim as *one* religion among many' (1988, 344).

(²³) As Gauri Viswanathan points out in her essay 'The Ordinary Business of the Occult', 'Books jointly authored by British initiates and Eastern spiritual adepts pose new challenges in the location of authority. Whose voice is to predominate; the voice of the spiritual master conveying the deepest secrets of the unknown or the voice of the interpreter and receiver through whom the last impregnable barrier of the unseen and unknown is breached?' Viswanathan is referring to the Indo-Tibetan masters through whom the Theosophists spoke rather than the joint authorship I speak of; however, the insight would be valid here as well. The adept in Sanskrit texts was Bhagavan Das rather than Besant who spoke nonetheless with easy authority on texts such as the *Bhagavad Gita* (Viswanathan 2000, 3).

(²⁴) See Joscelyn Godwin's *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (1994), particularly chapters 14 and 15, for the occult belief systems in which Madame Blavatsky, Henry Olcott, Charles W. Leadbeater, and Annie Besant were deeply embedded.

(²⁵) Revised editions of the book were published in 1914–15, first edition in 1940—after Annie Besant passed away—second edition in 1967, and third edition in 2000. It has not been possible to ascertain from when the Foreword stems.

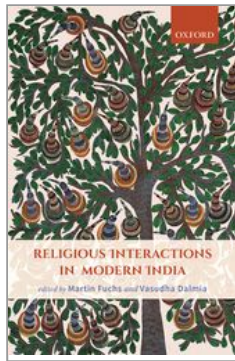
(²⁶) Savarkar, V.D., *Hindutva* (Mumbai: Swatantryaveer Savarakar Rashtriya Smarak, 1991, 26), cited in Sharma ([2003] 2015, 150). The reference was clearly to Muslims at large. Earlier in the same paragraph he has spoken of the invasion of Mohammad of Gazni: 'That day the conflict of life and death began.'

(²⁷) John Zavos offers a clear outline of the colonial politics of this period as well as the debates that followed in his very useful work *The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in India* (1980). His fourth chapter has provided most of the material of this and the following passage.

(²⁸) See the introduction of Pandey (1990).

(²⁹) Cited in Jordens (1981, 145).

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Configuring Community in Colonial and Precolonial Imaginaries

Insights from the Khalsa Darbar Records

Anne Murphy

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Abstract and Keywords

Addressing the question of the formation of a religious community by way of discussion of religious property regimes, the chapter follows the Sikh case over consecutive stages, concluding with the Gurdwara Reform Act of 1925, which recognized a central representative body of Sikhs, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, as possessing the rightful interest in Sikh religious sites. The author shows that colonial governance drew on pre-existing cultural, economic, and political forms, even as they transformed them. She discusses cases of earlier religious grants, documented especially by the Khalsa Darbar *dharmarth* records of the kingdom of Lahore. The tensions between individual and corporate control over gurdwaras and the lands associated with them were finally resolved in favour of the community with the Gurdwara Reform. In this new model, not only a community was tied to property, but also the idea of a singular Sikh community, and thus a new political form of community was instituted.

Keywords: religious community, Sikh community, Gurdwara Reform Act of 1925, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Khalsa Darbar *dharmarth* records, Lahore

The fight for control over Sikh religious sites in the 1920s, known as the Gurdwara Reform Movement, was a pivotal moment in the articulation of modern Sikh identity.¹ The movement sought to bring historical Sikh shrines in Punjab under centralized Sikh control, and culminated in the passage of the

Gurdwara Reform Act of 1925, which defined the nature of religious sites as Sikh and officially recognized a central representative body that possessed a rightful interest in these sites. That body, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), was sanctioned to govern Sikh historical shrines and act as a representative of Sikh interests; the organization continues to play a **(p.166)** central role in Sikh religious and political affairs. The Act also defined the individuals who comprised the community: that is, who could be defined as Sikh. Gurdwara reform, therefore, played an important role in both institutional and conceptual terms in the formation of Sikh political and religious subjectivities in the twentieth century.

The central question of the movement was framed in identitarian terms: who had the right to control Sikh institutions (and the substantial lands associated with them)?² By the early twentieth century, many Sikh shrines were controlled by caretakers who did not represent Khalsa Sikh norms; their right to manage Sikh shrines was therefore questioned. The relative *quality* of the caretaker represented an aspect of this debate over identity: Sundar Das, the *mahant*, or manager, in charge of the historical gurdwara at Guru ka Bagh (near Sultan Lodi in what is now the Indian state of Punjab), the site of a particularly powerful battle for control, was thus described in one account as a ‘depraved enemy of the *panth*’ (Kalāsvālia n.d., 5). More centrally—and more problematically from the perspective of colonial governance—the property relation between caretaker and site was also questioned. The situation was summarized as follows by Mian Fazl-i-Husain Khan (in whose portfolio as minister of education the management of religious institutions fell) in the Punjab Legislative Council debates of 1921:

It is alleged that these *mahants* and *pujari* have on account of circumstances over which they, the beneficiaries, have had no control assumed in some cases the role of proprietors, that instead of being appointed as servants of the institutions, they have arrogated to themselves the right to succeed on account of being bodily or spiritual heirs of the last *mahants*. (*Punjab Legislative Council Debates* 1921, 532)

The individual managers of these sites were thus, in this argument, wrongly designated as owners of such institutions under British colonial law. The nature of property itself as it was configured under colonial law, therefore, was implicated in the movement for gurdwara reform.³

(p.167) This chapter seeks to explicate more fully what was at stake in the debate around and resolution of gurdwara reform; the argument pursued also is of broader significance. The idea of community—that seemingly ‘natural order of things political and social’, as Gyanendra Pandey has called it—has played a profound role in South Asia, both as a fundamental provision within colonial governance and within the postcolonial state (Pandey 2005, 409; see also Das 1991, ch. 4). Sudipta Kaviraj’s formulation of the ‘fuzzy community’ provided a

relatively early and influential formulation of an understanding of 'community' in the precolonial context that can be contrasted with the enumerated and bounded community imagined in the colonial state. While Kaviraj conceded that earlier forms of communitarian organization were based on identity, 'solidarity was not based upon a convergence of interest' and was not territorial and enumerated, with a resulting sense of community that was 'multiple and layered and fuzzy, [such that] no single community could make demands of pre-emptive belonging as comprehensive as that made by the modern nation state' (Kaviraj 1992, 20–1, 26). Along such lines Gyanendra Pandey argued in his early work that precolonial solidarity was established on a case-by-case basis, based on 'jati, biradari, caste and kinship' until the later colonial and nationalist period, when 'community' became fixed (Pandey 1990, 158–9; 198 for quote). After being fixed, as Pandey puts it, 'the explicit statement of objects and rights now became a feature of such [that is, collective] actions, their scale expanded, and they brought diverse 'communities' into more and more frequent confrontation with the state' (Pandey 1990, 159). With this, Pandey does not explain away concepts of community in the 'fuzzy' precolonial period; instead, he argues that caste, sect, and other identities, in contrast to fixed and monolithic notions of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' that emerged in the colonial period, were there to be worked through (Pandey 1990, 200; see a parallel argument in Chatterjee 1993, 165, 167ff.). Such premodern (and, in this case, precolonial) ideas of 'community' are in this way contrasted with those that are constructed in relation to the colonial and modern state (Pandey 2005, 415).⁴ Along **(p.168)** similar lines, the community provides a productive working area for Partha Chatterjee's evolving understanding of the political. As he makes clear in his 1993 work, the community offered an alternative to the individualist orientation of Western enlightenment thought, such that South Asians in the colonial period sought to 'construct their national identities within a different narrative, that of the community' (Chatterjee 1993, 237). It is also characteristic of the 'politics of the governed,' laid out in Chatterjee's more recent work. Such politics reflect a conflict born of an 'opposition between the universal ideal of civic nationalism, based on individual freedoms and equal rights irrespective of distinctions of religion, race, language or culture, and the particular demands of cultural identity'. That cultural identity speaks against unrelenting universals in the language of community, a 'strategic politics of groups, classes, communities, ethnicities' that seeks restitutive treatment for the disadvantaged so defined (Chatterjee 2004, 4, 22).

To understand what was innovative and what was not in British governance in this context, we must understand what preceded the British system. Indeed, as Sumit Guha (among others) has noted, if we are to attribute change to the colonial period, modernity, or further to today's period of 'high globalization', to use Arjun Appadurai's (2006, 2) term, it is necessary to assess the past in relation to that which follows more carefully, 'to examine the processes of

identity definition before and during the great divide' of colonialism/modernity (Guha 2003, 149). Understanding of colonial innovation in the area of property ownership and communitarian understandings of it, therefore, requires further exploration of the precolonial period—and thus movement beyond what Guha rightly calls 'scrutiny of the conveniently accessible colonial record' (Guha 2003, 149). Both Guha's and Norbert Peabody's work has suggested that communitarian identity was utilized in governance in precolonial polities; Peabody's work on the census, for instance, shows that there was a precolonial interest in enumerating communities, and particularly castes; such interests were not born of the colonial period alone. Yet, at the same time **(p.169)** that he asserts a parallel between precolonial and colonial, Peabody eschews 'an easy continuity from the precolonial to the colonial in terms of forms of knowledge and attendant institutions' (2001, 819). The finding of commonalities 'across the divide', therefore, does not necessarily indicate a lack of substantive change.

This chapter seeks to provide further investigation in this vein, to understand the specific ways in which colonial governance interceded in South Asian forms of knowledge and subjectivity; as will be seen, I trace out commonalities but do not argue for simple continuity between the precolonial and colonial periods. Whereas Peabody and Guha focused in their work on enumeration, showing that it existed prior to the colonial period and that colonial versions of the same reflected precolonial enumerative orders, this examination focuses on property. As David Gilmartin has pointed out, property was the cornerstone of the colonial project, but was also one that thoroughly embraced South Asian communitarian ideological formations (2003, 34). This chapter will provide one specific example of how identity—both individual and communitarian—was constituted with reference to property in the context of the transition to colonial rule, to reveal the ways that colonial governance both transformed and drew on pre-existing cultural, economic, and political forms.

The Khalsa Darbar Records

Land endowments to religious institutions have long constituted the means for the maintenance of religious sites in South Asia. I examine here precolonial religious land grants in Punjab under the post-Mughal state of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and his successors, extending the work done on these and similar records from the period by Indu Banga, J.S. Grewal, and B. Goswamy, to suggest how the nature of ownership expressed within them shows unexpected similarities to, as well as significant differences from, later British-period formations of property and the determination of the appropriate owners/managers of religious sites (Banga 1978; Banga and Grewal 1987; Goswamy and Grewal 1967; 1968).⁵ The interests of this chapter **(p.170)** therefore relate to a much larger and rather thorny question in the historiography of South Asia: the status of property ownership in the precolonial period and the relationship of this kind of 'ownership' to later colonial period formulations. As Irfan Habib noted quite some time ago, "The search after the "owner of the soil" in India before the

British conquest has exercised the ingenuity of many modern writers' (1963, 111). Habib and a large number of writers after him have in general argued that the status of land did change under the British, although details on how and why have varied (Dirks 1987; 1992; Guha 1981/1996; Oldenburg 2002; Stein 1992). I focus here on a specific aspect of this change, with reference to the central issue at stake in the Gurdwara Reform Movement of the 1920s: *Who* had the right to the ownership of gurdwaras and associated properties? In the British period, ownership had been granted to mahant/managers of sites, many of whom were seen to act in a manner *not* responsible to the communities associated with the gurdwaras. This resulted in a crisis over control. The designation of ownership to such managers was seen as a change from precolonial ownership as implemented under the Mughals and then under the Lahore state of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, requiring the remedy that was the Gurdwara Act of 1925.

Our entry into granting practices in the precolonial period are the Khalsa Darbar Records, the Persian-language records of the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and his successors.⁶ The state of Maharaja Ranjit Singh coalesced out of the political turmoil of the mid- to late eighteenth century, when centralized imperial Mughal power began to fracture at the peripheries, and successor groups began to vie for power across the north after the death of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb in 1707 (Alam 1986; Marshall 2003; Singh 1993). Many of the states that arose over the century, even when largely autonomous, continued to pay allegiance to the Mughal centre at Delhi, and/or continued certain aspects of Mughal administration. This was also true in the case of Sikh and other post-Mughal forces in Punjab, including the kingdom of Lahore founded under Ranjit Singh by 1799. Indeed, Goswamy and Grewal note that religious endowment documents in Sikh contexts (those of Ranjit Singh's court as well as those of other **(p.171)** Sikh chiefs) became more and not less similar to Mughal documents over time.⁷

Ranjit Singh's rule was characterized by deep interest in Western technologies and forms of knowledge, and the rule of Sikh chiefs in general was highly influenced by interaction with the British East India Company over the course of the first half of the nineteenth century. Indeed, Sikh-led principalities that lay on the south-eastern side of the Satluj, the Phulkiān states, remained independent of Ranjit Singh's control by accepting a British East India Company presence as a counterweight to the mahārājā's power to the west of Satluj in 1809, when a treaty between Ranjit Singh and the Company recognized the mahārājā's sovereignty over Punjab and protected those in the east from his encroachment. This kept the British out of direct interference in the kingdom, although the presence of British observers certainly shaped aspects of the Punjabi and Sikh political and imaginative universe in the period (Dhavan 2011). Ten years after the mahārājā's death, in 1839, the state was conquered and integrated into British East India territory. Up until that time, when the British came to

administer land claims, Ranjit Singh's kingdom retained key elements of Mughal administrative structure and practice.

As was the custom in the Mughal period, religious grants (called, in Mughal contexts, *madad-i-ma'āsh*) were revenue-free grants, meaning that the revenue from the land was not remitted to the state and was dedicated to the care of the holder (Habib 1963/1999, 342ff.; Mohammed 2002, 23). They could be resumed, and the resumption of such grants was an on-going political matter. For example, Aurangzeb in 1661 defined the principles by which confirmation and resumption of such grants would be governed, but these were subverted by later policies (Mohammed 2002, 52–3). Non-Muslim *madad-i-ma'āsh*, as a whole, were later ordered for resumption by Aurangzeb in 1672–3. This policy, however, was never fully enforced (Habib 1963/1999, 356ff.). Indeed, some grants to Hindu *madad-i-ma'āsh* holders were confirmed and renewed from 1672 onwards (Mohammed 2002, 38). **(p.172)** In this way, religious grants were like general land grants: as demonstrated in the work of Brian Caton, they were political in nature, designating political rights and relationships in relation to land, rather than a politically independent, stable, and solely economic relationship to land as property (2003, 161ff.). Aurangzeb defined such grants as equivalent to a kind of loan, such that full proprietary possession was not implied.⁸ This continued in the period after the Mughals, under Sikh and other rulers in Punjab. Later rulers, such as Maharaja Ranjit Singh, generally offered confirmations of the grants made by previous rulers in the Mughal period. Confirmations were also required when there was a change of leadership in a religious institution (Goswamy and Grewal 1967, 31).⁹ Such grants, in general, were one means to bolster the rule of the sovereign: Irfan Habib argues that the state maintained grantees as the empire's 'natural apologists and propagandists ... [and] a bastion of conservatism, because they had nothing except their orthodoxy to justify their claims on the state's bounty'.¹⁰ Indeed, Jahangir defined these individuals as members of 'the army of prayer', and this army contained non-Muslims alongside Muslims (a sensibility that continued under successors to the Mughals).¹¹ Such sites continued to function as an aspect of state formation and rule, and their management reflected an evolving set of political relations with the state.

(p.173) The *dharmarth* records of Ranjit Singh's court—grants 'for the purpose of *dharam*'—reveal the mechanics of the court patronage of religious sites. It must be emphasized, however, that the *dharmarth*, or religious, grants of the Khalsa Darbar corpus in their current form do not provide a diachronic view of granting practices over the entire duration of the Lahore kingdom from 1799 to its annexation in 1849. The grants made during this period were collected and reformulated at the time of annexation and reveal not an 'innocent' record of past practices, but instead reflect the confirmation process associated with the continuation of grants during a period of political change: they constitute a set of claims being put before the new rulers of Punjab, the East India Company.

Dharmarth records indeed are largely absent from the chronologically ordered general records of the court, which were archived on an annual basis. A section is provided for dharmarth records in each annual collection of records, but that section is left empty in almost every year's records. The dharmarth grants were instead collected into a single set of volumes, separate from the general yearly records of the court, and kept at the end of the corpus of records. They are clearly dated with the Christian year 1849 (as well as with the year in the Indian calendar, Sambat 1906) and with explicit reference to the British and their documentation of ownership rights.¹²

The Khalsa Darbar Records, and the dharmarth grants from elsewhere examined by Banga and Grewal, reveal the broad logic of the assignment and management of religious grants under Ranjit Singh and successors. This provides an important point for comparison with later developments under British rule, when the appropriate owners/managers of sites were fixed by the state and the definition of the rightful body/person/owner had a profound effect. As mentioned earlier, the Gurdwara Reform Movement was animated by the question of who were the appropriate owners of Sikh religious sites. Managers known as mahants had generally been granted ownership by the colonial state; the rights of these managers were challenged by Akali activists, who sought to establish Sikh community control over Sikh **(p.174)** religious sites. The central questions here in relation to the Khalsa Darbar Records with respect to the Gurdwara Reform Movement thus are these: Who were the recipients of religious grants in the Lahore state, and how were rights established?¹³

The Dharmarth records associated with the Lahore court are organized according to the broad category of recipients, with entire books dedicated to the Sodhis, Bedis, and Bhallas, the family lineages of the Sikh Gurus. It is not surprising that the Gurus' family members would receive patronage—indeed, the Gurus themselves were said to have been recipients of grants in the Mughal period. Most such land grants, however, are not substantiated in the Mughal imperial record.¹⁴ In this later period, on the other hand, grants to the Gurus' families are well attested. In these cases, individuals were designated as the recipients of grants, representing respective family lineages. Such grants might become quasi-hereditary.¹⁵ The Sodhis benefitted particularly from grants from Sikh rulers and 'held revenue free lands in nearly all parts of the Punjab' (Banga 1978, 156).¹⁶ Banga notes that the largess enjoyed by the Bedis and Sodhis certainly reflected not only the rulers' 'piety and catholic outlook,' but also their 'practical good sense' (Banga 1978, 167) and, as Andrew Major has similarly argued, demonstrates the role of such religious figures as 'warrior-priests and militant champions of the principle of Sikh theocracy' (1996, 145).

A wide range of religious persons were represented in the Khalsa Darbar Records, as in the similar grants outside this corpus examined **(p.175)** by Grewal and Banga. Hindu religious specialists and Muslim saints, as well as Sikh

religious specialists, were honoured with grants, and past grants were confirmed. Thus, in the Khalsa Darbar Records, entire volumes were dedicated to 'Sādhs and Udāsī' (Bundle 5, Volume 2), Brahmins and Purohīts (Bundle 5, Volumes 5 and 7), Sayyids and Faqīrs (Bundle 5, Volume 11), and famous Sardārs and dependents (Bundle 5, Volume 12). Support of a range of religious specialists from different faith traditions reflects what Banga calls the 'self-interest of the rulers [which] dictated conciliation of all classes of their subjects and no other sections could serve better as vested interests than those that commanded influence with the subject peoples' (Banga 1978, 167).¹⁷ Sikh rulers were following South Asia-wide precedent in granting wide protection for religious persons and institutions. Elites—such as those associated with Gurus' families, but also others—were protected through such grants. Such interests clearly reflect 'that the Maharaja was keen to create vested interests in support of the state' (Banga and Grewal 1987, 69). Grants are referred to as 'coming down from olden times' or being in accordance with 'former practice' or 'ways of old' (*b' qarār-i-qadīm, az qadīm al-ayyām* or *bedastur-i-sābeq*).¹⁸ Thus, though grants were not automatically transferred, established precedent based on prior grants was recognized. Grants also refer to prior collections of documents (*isnād*) and provide summary histories of prior grants and their confirmation, usually with reference to Maharaja Ranjit Singh or his successors, Kharak Singh, Sher Singh, or Daleep Singh.¹⁹ Banga and Grewal found in **(p.176)** the grants they examined that the rights and privileges assigned by other rulers were maintained and protected; this is also evidenced within the Khalsa Darbar Records.²⁰ Overall, the huge mass of dharmarth records contained within the overall court records of the Khalsa Darbar establish claims on the new rulers of Punjab in 1849 and make a political claim for recognition of a right, based on precedent. Such grants are thus political documents, treaties of a sort. As such, they had to be affirmed by the new political order. Specific reasons for grants are not generally indicated outside of the broad categories provided for in the section headings in the Khalsa Darbar Records. In very few cases the reason for the grant seems to be in association with the performance of the prayer, *ardās*.²¹

Individuals are indicated as the recipient of grants in the Khalsa Darbar dharmarth records with few exceptions, but community designations provide the central organizing principle on multiple levels. Individuals are thus always located within broader group categories. The naming of the recipient or recipients of a grant, for example, is accompanied by indication of the individual's lineage: father and grandfather (very few women appear) or, in the case of disciples, a lineage of teachers.²² Lineage also operates in the overall categories of recipients defined by blood relation to the guru. Caste or community name is also commonly defined in the records, although only to Brahmins is an entire section of grants given; this is referred to as *qaum*, that notoriously difficult-to-translate term that later comes to be associated with the English term and idea 'nation'; here it seems best translated as 'community'.

The term was commonly used in such terms in documents of this period in Punjab and beyond, perhaps (p.177) because, as Sumit Guha has discussed, ‘by the sixteenth century ... Mughal administrative usage popularized the term *qaum* for ascriptive communities’.²³ We also see individuals identified by role (*sādh*, *udās*, *purohit*, *faqīr*, *bhāi*), in the broad categories that govern the organization of the Khalsa Darbar Records.²⁴ This is true for all but two volumes, which will be discussed further below. There are only a few examples where there is any ambiguity regarding the recipient of a grant, where the notion of a collectivity is introduced instead of an individual. In one grant studied by Banga and Grewal, for example, it is said that ‘one of the preserves held by Sardar Ratan Singh Garjakhia should be given by him to the Gujjars of the city of Lahore’, thus delineating the Gujjars as a corporate body as recipient. A similar situation can be found for the Jogis of Jakhbar (Banga and Grewal 1987, 166; Document 302; Goswamy and Grewal 1967, 10–11). This, however, is very rare. The grants, therefore, are clearly structured to account for communitarian organization *through* the designation of individual recipients, who might stand for communities of different types. Communitarian formulations are thus articulated through individuals.

The first volume of the Khalsa Darbar series provides a counter example of interest, where neither an individual nor a collectivity is the governing principle: these grants are dedicated to the *granth sāhibān*, or the esteemed texts, the Adi Granth and the Baba Granth Sahib, which seems to indicate, respectively, the version of the canon edited by Guru Arjan and completed in 1604, and the Guru Granth Sahib, the final canonical version of the text. Even here, however, of the twenty-seven grants listed, the overwhelming majority clearly defines an individual person or individuals as the recipients of grants.²⁵ One, (p.178) for instance, is given to the Adi Granth, but in the name of the Sodhi Sahib at Kartarpur.²⁶ There are two grants, which do not clearly define an individual human recipient, but seem to be for the *granth* or text itself, and one that seems to be for the *granth* and for an individual associated with it as a *granthi* or one who works with the text.²⁷ Most of these recipients are male (and in all grants, genealogy is defined in patrilineal terms), but women are mentioned in two cases.²⁸ Individual designation still prevails, with few exceptions.

How, then, was the Darbar Sahib (known popularly in English as the Golden Temple)—one of the most important of Sikh institutions—treated, and how were grants related to it assigned? The Khalsa Darbar Records contain an entire volume dedicated to it (Bundle 5, Volume 8) (Kaur 1983, 1). In general, control over the Darbar Sahib had followed the pattern of that of other Sikh religious sites over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, during the period of political chaos in Punjab, in that it was controlled by various parties. It only later came to be controlled by members of the Sikh mainstream tradition. Prithi Chand, who challenged the guruship of Guru Arjan, controlled the site with his son Harji in the second half of the seventeenth century, after the time of

the sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind, and it remained under the control of this group (known as the 'Mīnās') until the time of Guru Gobind Singh (**p.179**) (Kaur 1983, 26).²⁹ The proprietary rights of Chak Guru, as the the present city of Amritsar was called, were later said to have been given to Baba Ajit Singh, the adopted son of Mata Sundari, the widow of Guru Gobind Singh, by the Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah, to be managed by Bhai Mani Singh.³⁰ This was apparently later resumed (Kaur 1983, 39). Several scholars have noted that grants were made to important personnel; indeed, Banga argues that the Darbar Sahib received so many grants from so many different rulers and chiefs that separate *mutasaddīs*, or managers, were appointed to manage the revenues (Banga 1978, 159; see also Kaur 1983, 52; Pashaura Singh 2006, 120).³¹ The Khalsa Darbar Records as we see them today, however, overwhelmingly indicate that individuals were given grants rather than the Darbar Sahib itself. Out of 115 total grants (and an additional narrative about a grān̄thi who had lost his rights), all but 4 are grants made out to individuals. The exceptions that do exist are grants made out not to the Darbar Sahib itself but to the Akal Bunga, one of the many *bunge*, or dwelling places, generally associated with Sikh chiefs or militia leaders on the site of the Darbar Sahib.³² Grān̄this received a total of twenty-eight grants, and a total of thirteen grants were made for *mutasaddī* (caretakers) and *pujārī*. Additional grants were made to others associated with the administration and ritual functioning of the institution: *rabābīs and rāgīs* (eleven grants); *ardasiye*, persons responsible for the recitation of the prayer ardās (six grants); *amle*, or staff/workers (including *dhūpīe* [incense lighters], a candle lighter, and the holder of keys; 7 grants); people associated with particular sites: the Akal Bunga (thirty-three grants), Dera Baba Atal Sahib and Gurdwara Bheek Singh (two grants each); Jandh Bunga (eight grants); and Bunga Sarkarwala (one grant). It must be remembered that these records may not necessarily be accurate representations of all types of grants related to dharmarth over the course of the Lahore kingdom, (**p.180**) and reflect the interests brought before the new sovereign body in Punjab (the East India Company administration). But it is still significant that the language of individuals—rather than collectivities, or sites themselves—prevails so completely, with only few exceptions.

Who, then, ultimately was proprietor of the Darbar Sahib/Golden Temple, and who was responsible for its administration? One can see intimations of the rhetoric of community in the early efforts of the widow of the tenth Guru, Mata Sundari. She is said to have intervened in the management of the Darbar Sahib during the early eighteenth century on behalf of the Sikh community. Evidence of this, however, is reserved for later, such as in the writings of Ratan Singh Bhangu in the mid-nineteenth century (Kaur 1983, 34). There is little early documentation of this.³³ When the Darbar Sahib came under the control of the British administration of Punjab, it was managed through a committee. A jagīr was granted to its head grān̄thi in 1847.³⁴ Ian Kerr notes that 'the British willingness to provide this financial support came from their belief that it³⁵

politically benefited the Raj by (1) providing the British with a way to influence and pressure the influential functionaries of the Temple, and by (2) gaining the gratitude of the Sikh community' (1976, 310). The appointed managing committee framed a set of rules and regulations for the Golden Temple's administration, entitled the 'Dastur-ul'Amal', in which ownership was defined as follows: '(T)he sole proprietor of this sacred institution for ever is Guru Ramdass: no person else has any title to proprietorship. The claim to the noviciate or chelaship belongs to the whole "Khalsa" body. The Pujaris and others receive their wages from the offerings according to their appointed dues for service performed'.³⁶

This document provides a glimpse of the transition in property and the logic of ownership in relation to the idea of community that emerges in the colonial period. In the historical record (including the Khalsa Darbar Records) a range of individuals is identified as holding **(p.181)** grants in association with sites, representing different kinds of communities. None are designated as representing any one religious group. The Sikh community as a single entity sovereign over such sites, therefore, was a new way to conceptualize the control of these sites.

The Logic of Property and the Designation of Community

How did such a transition occur, such that a corporate body was declared a *chela*, or disciple, and thereby hereditary right-holder to the Darbar Sahib? This is not a small matter. This transition relates to a larger British effort to relinquish the state's role as manager and patron of religious sites in the nineteenth century.³⁷ The Religious Endowments Act of 1863 was passed soon after the declaration regarding the Darbar Sahib and was intended to allow the Board of Revenue to withdraw from active oversight of religious sites.³⁸ Managers were provided for by the Act of 1863, and they had a great deal of control; property could be alienated by them, for instance—one of the basic defining features of ownership. However, at the same time, communities were also defined in relation to religious sites. One needed to have 'a right of attendance, or having been in the habit of attending, at the performance of the worship or service of any Mosque, Temple, or religious establishment, or of partaking in the benefit of any distribution of alms' at an establishment to gain the right of interest.³⁹ This was an all-India phenomenon. Thus, Arjun Appadurai names two 'radical generative consequences', as he calls them, of British Indian treatment of religious endowments with respect to the temple he examines in Madras Presidency:

First, the notion of a Tenkalai community in Triplicane, which had the exclusive right to control the temple, was elaborated, refined, and codified; at the same time, and paradoxically, various subgroups **(p.182)** and individuals within this Tenkalai community were encouraged to emphasize the heterogeneity of their interests and to formulate their *special* rights in

a mutually antagonistic way, thus making authority in the temple even more fragile than it previously had been. (Appadurai 1981, 176)

With British attempts to designate entities to which they could hand over control, individuals made claims to represent communities, and the communities thus represented were defined. The process allowed for their agonistic definition vis-à-vis others in contests for control over sites.

This is what we see happening in the Gurdwara Reform Movement of the 1910s and 1920s. Richard Fox describes this as the ‘Third Sikh War’, ‘anti-colonial revolt in Punjab villages’ that was driven by the instability wrought by economic change in the province (Fox 1985, 87); as Tai Yong Tan notes, it was also ‘the most sustained and widespread case of military dissent in British Punjab’ (Tan 2005, 188). Centrally, the movement was about the question of who had the right to control gurdwaras and the lands associated with them. We can see in the designation of the Darbar Sahib as the property of the Khalsa body the way the community is defined as a cohesive whole, as owner. Thus, changes in the state’s relationship to religious sites, an all-India phenomenon, took on a particular cast in Punjab that mapped the Sikh community onto Sikh place.⁴⁰ Given that grants visible within the Khalsa Darbar Records overwhelmingly indicate individuals as recipients, as the British did in their original settlement of religious sites, the operative difference between colonial and precolonial forms of religious support is *not* in the designation of individuals as the recipients of grants. The precolonial system was also structured in individual and identitarian terms, and the Sikh or Khalsa community overall was not named in the precolonial records as the recipient of grants. The granting of rights to individuals was thus not foreign to the precolonial understanding of societal organization and individual subjectivity.

At the same time, colonial governance did dramatically shape the conceptualization and lived experience of identities and communities in multiple ways. What then was innovative? What was the change **(p.183)** instituted after the British intervention in Punjabi property relations? One answer to this question lies in the designation of a community of ownership: Gurdwara Reform instituted a new articulation of the idea of community vis-à-vis the religious site, even as continuities with precolonial forms of management of religious sites were maintained. A further answer also lies in the vexed question of how property itself was conceived of: The particular nature of land grants in the precolonial period and their fundamental difference from grants after the onset of colonial rule, with reference to the idea of ownership, made the solution to this problem, as well as the problem itself, new. In the precolonial period, as has been discussed, grants were conceived of as political—and therefore in need of renegotiation and reinstatement in the wake of political and institutional change. In the British colonial view, properties were fixed, signifying an enduring and fundamentally economic relationship. The precolonial form of property and land

management could not be reinstated without a rejection of the rule of property, a step the Crown government of Punjab was unwilling to take: private property was a fundamental logic of Crown rule. As a result, Gurdwara Reform negotiated a new, third model for the community, where religious sites were the sovereign right of the community as a whole, and a new logic of a singular Sikh community was instituted to ameliorate the situation, encompassing at times, and eschewing at others, the complex identities revealed in the Khalsa Darbar Records. What is striking, therefore, about the transformations visible within Gurdwara Reform is that the issue at the centre of debate—who has a right to ownership—was *not* actually the location for significant innovation by the colonial administration, counter to the assumption that prevailed at the time, and is generally accepted today. Innovation was found instead in the way a particular idea of ‘community’ was tied to property and in the way property itself was conceived of. This, in turn, determined a new political form of the ‘community’.

The idea of community was configured in multiple ways in both the precolonial and colonial record, such that the effort to ‘fix’ the problem of ownership in the context of gurdwara management—a problem that was described in period accounts as having been instituted by the British—instead of returning to an earlier precolonial form, instituted a new form of ownership and control and an **(p.184)** attendant new definition of community. At the same time, there are perhaps more commonalities between the colonial and the precolonial systems than might be expected. This exploration thus reveals a crucial juncture where colonial governance interacted with (and at times impinged) on pre-existing conceptualizations of the idea of community not through a simple process of erasure, but through the implementation of existing categories in new ways and through new administrative and economic structures. Thus, it must be emphasized that the argument here is not one of invention—gurdwaras reflect a long precolonial history and have formed the central locus of Sikh congregational life since the initiation of the tradition—but instead that their modern (colonial and postcolonial) management represents a complex amalgam of precolonial and colonial practices and understandings of the formation of the religious community and its relationship to the religious site. The Sikh gurdwara in its modern form, therefore, reflects the interaction of the precolonial logic of the gurdwara with colonial and related social and political forces, providing a complex genealogy of the idea of both the gurdwara and the Sikhs as a ‘community’ defined in relation to it.

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Notes:

⁽¹⁾ Research for this chapter was undertaken as a senior research fellow with the American Institute for Indian Studies, University of Chicago, USA, in 2009–10; materials examined here are discussed in the context of a different argument in Murphy (2012). Special thanks to the editors of this volume for their valuable comments on chapter drafts; feedback from participants in the seminar associated with the volume was exceptionally helpful.

⁽²⁾ The debate associated with the movement was also framed in historical terms; this is explored at length in Murphy (2012).

⁽³⁾ The broader context of the debate is discussed in Murphy (2012, chapters 6 and 7); the data from the Khalsa Darbar Records is discussed there in chapter 5. I utilize the same material here to delve deeper into core questions that emerge in it.

⁽⁴⁾ The contrast between premodern and modern (like the tripartite schema of precolonial/colonial/postcolonial) is itself insufficient for addressing the complexity of the many lives of ‘community’ and ‘identity’; Appadurai (2006, 6ff.), for instance, has identified the uncertain and shifting nature of identity and its relationship to the state as a key feature of our current globalized moment.

⁽⁵⁾ Significant differences exist in my account and Banga’s (1978) account of the Khalsa Darbar *dharamarth* records.

⁽⁶⁾ I draw here on discussion in Murphy (2012, chapter 5).

⁽⁷⁾ On the practices of Sikh chiefs, see Goswamy and Grewal (1968, 30–1); on the resemblance between Sikh and Mughal documents, see 44. On the involvement of Ranjit Singh and other Sikh chiefs in such grants, see Banga (1978, 150–1), and for an example of one chief’s grants overall, see 166.

⁽⁸⁾ Habib (1963/1999, 348–9). Aurangzeb made these grants hereditary in 1690, but retained control over the grants by imperial authorities and asserted their status as loans. Habib (1963/1999, 351); see also Mohammed (2002, 53). Later, in Awadh, *milkiyat*, or proprietary, rights were conferred, paralleling the transition that took place under the British (Mohammed 2002, 39).

⁽⁹⁾ This was in keeping with Mughal administrative policies. See Major (1996, 25ff.). Examples of such confirmations are given in Goswamy and Grewal (1967, 27–8, 79–86, 95–9).

⁽¹⁰⁾ Habib (1963/1999, 355). See also Mohammed (2002, 47–8). This is notably similar to the role local religious elites played under colonial rule in Punjab, as discussed at length in Gilmartin (1988).

⁽¹¹⁾ On the army of prayer, see Mohammed (2002, 32). For the example of non-Muslim supporters of the Mughals, see Goswamy and Grewal (1967, 36, 164). On the army of prayer for a Sikh leader, see Goswamy and Grewal (1968, 247–9).

⁽¹²⁾ See, for example, Khalsa Darbar Records, Vol. 8, nos 43 and 159, which mentions the *kitāb-i-angrez* and a *m'aaf*, or special grant, entered into it.

⁽¹³⁾ See Murphy (2012, chapter 5).

⁽¹⁴⁾ A land grant was said to have been made to Guru Amar Das through his daughter Bibi Bhani in Amritsar district, but corroboration of this does not exist (Singh 2006, 18, 107). Similarly, a land grant given to Ram Das and his sons is said to have been granted by Akbar, although there is also not mention of this in the records (Pashaura Singh 2006, 81). For further discussion of evidence along such lines, see Murphy (2012, chapter 5).

⁽¹⁵⁾ Sachdeva (1993, 122–3). See also Banga and Grewal (1987, 73; Document 383). The Bedis benefitted immensely, particularly the family of Sahib Singh of Una. On grants to the Bedis, see Khalsa Darbar Records (Bundle 5, Volume 3), Caton (2003, 48, 181, 194ff.), and Banga (1978, 157n47, 157–8). The Bhalla family received a smaller number of grants (on the Bhalla family grants, see Khalsa Darbar Records, Bundle 5, Volume 4, and Banga 1978, 158).

⁽¹⁶⁾ For Sodhi grants, see Khalsa Darbar Records (Bundle 5, Volume 9).

⁽¹⁷⁾ Indu Banga argues that 'Muslim grantees received essentially the same treatment from the Sikh rulers as the Hindu or Sikh grantees', but this cannot be confirmed without a more detailed comparative study of the granting practices of the Lahore state in relation to prior state patronage (Banga 1978, 164).

⁽¹⁸⁾ These terms are used so ubiquitously throughout the Khalsa Darbar Records that individual instances are not useful to cite; for a few examples, see for *az* or *be qarār-i-qadīm*, Vol. 1, no. 35; Vol. 6, no. 269; Vol. 8, no. 181, 227; Vol. 11, no. 9; Vol. 12, no. 5; for *az qadīm al-ayyām*, Vol. 3, no. 5, 19; Vol. 8, no. 177; for *be-dastur-i-sābeq*, Vol. 4, no. 51; Vol. 8, no. 160; Vol. 14, no. 13; for *az qadīm-i-m'aaf*, Vol. 8, no. 175. Banga and Grewal (1987, 69; documents 123, 129, 199, 262, 323, 372).

⁽¹⁹⁾ For *isnād*, see Khalsa Darbar Records, Vol. 1, no. 7 and Vol. 8, no. 37. For a good example of how prior grants are listed, see as just one of many examples Khalsa Darbar Records, Vol. 7, no. 7.

⁽²⁰⁾ Banga and Grewal (1987, 68; documents 141 and 183; quote is from 183, p. 136).

(²¹) Found but not common in the Khalsa Darbar Records, a possible example is Vol. 1, no. 7, but the translation of this is open to interpretation; it is more clearly indicated that a grant is for the 'doing' of *ardās*, in other examples, see Vol. 2, no. 43. See also Banga and Grewal (1987, 140, document 199); they translate the relevant phrase as 'on account of *ardās*'.

(²²) Two volumes are recorded as 'miscellaneous', and these volumes too indicate individual recipients of grants, without much detail on the reasons for the grants or the specific roles associated with grantees. Khalsa Darbar Records, Vols 13 and 14.

(²³) See Guha (2013, 27ff.); see also Caton (2004, 37-8), cited also by Guha on p. 29.

(²⁴) *Bhai* is ubiquitous in the Khalsa Darbar Records, and was used as a section heading to denote an entire category of recipients (Bundle 5, Volume 10, Part 1). On 'bhai', see also Banga and Grewal (1987, 70, and, for example, Document 129, p. 124). There is a similar range of persons recognized in the body of grants Banga and Grewal examine, such as a *dhadhi*, and a Misr Ratan Chand who was meant to pray for the mahārājā's health. Banga and Grewal (1987, 69; Documents 244 and 238 respectively).

(²⁵) There is a case found by Banga and Grewal, where the Guru Granth Sahib itself seems to have been designated as a grantee, but the language is not definitive. The grant reads, with Banga and Grewal's translation, as indicating that 'a well in village Chane has been held by Bhai Mal Singh since olden times in *dharmarth* on account of Sri Granth Sahib Jio at Ram Garh' (dated Lahore, 1 Har 1891 [12 June 1834]) (Banga and Grewal 1987, 70; Document 262). Thus, although Banga and Grewal assert that this is a grant to the Guru Granth Sahib, it is articulated through a human caretaker. See Goswamy and Grewal (1968, Document XXI, 217-18; Document XXVIII, 243-5).

(²⁶) Another, which mentions John Lawrence, is for Sodhi Sadhu Singh. Khalsa Darbar Records, Vol. 1, no. 3, for the first example, no. 9 for the second.

(²⁷) Khalsa Darbar Records, Vol. 1, nos 5 and 35 for the grānth alone, and no. 21 for the grānth, and an individual.

(²⁸) The *ahliye*, or relations, of a male are noted as recipients. Khalsa Darbar Records, Vol. 1, no. 23 for the first, no. 53 for the second instance. This term is used throughout the records for female descendants or recipients.

(²⁹) The Minas were defined as an apostate group.

(³⁰) See Kaur (1983, 32n70). A later *jagīr* was issued in 1749, but the direct recipient of this is unclear Kaur (1983, 43). It also should be noted that the destruction of the Golden Temple in this period, like the assignment of rights to

it, also was determined within a larger set of political relations. For the larger pattern that relates to this, see Eaton (2000).

⁽³¹⁾ On grants to personnel, see Kaur (1983, 55) and Banga (1978, 159n57).

⁽³²⁾ Khalsa Darbar Records, Bundle 5, Volume 8, records 141, 143, 145, 159.

⁽³³⁾ This evidence is reviewed in Murphy (2012, chapter 5).

⁽³⁴⁾ Cited in Kerr (1976). See *Lahore Political Diaries*, 355, 363.

⁽³⁵⁾ In the original it is: 'if'.

⁽³⁶⁾ See reference in Kaur (1983, 62 and Appendix IV, 199–203). See Kerr (1976, 316–19). The 'Administration Paper for the Sikh Temple', dated 15 September 1859, is included as an appendix, 317–19.

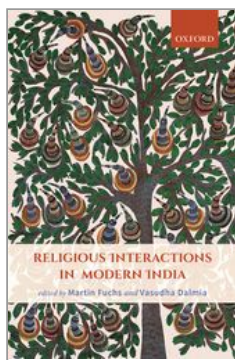
⁽³⁷⁾ For discussion of this transition, see Murphy (2013).

⁽³⁸⁾ India Office Library Records, v/8/39, Act No. XX of 1863, Section 1. See India Office Library Records, L/P&J/5/3, for proposed bills, statements of objects and reason, and final published bill.

⁽³⁹⁾ India Office Library Records, v/8/39, Act No. XX of 1863 Section XV.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ For more, see Murphy (2012).

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Educating the Monkhood

Dādūpanthī Reforms in the Twentieth Century

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Abstract and Keywords

The chapter examines the stages of self-reform of the Dādūpanthi *sant sampradaya* between the 1890s and the present day. Originally a sect dominated by *sadhus*, the reform process meant a shift from monastic to lay ideals and to governance by householders, many of whom, however, were ex-sadhus. The process created deep rifts between sadhus and householders. The backbone of the story is the stepwise dismantling and, in 1938, final disbandment of the military Nāgā wing of the Dādūpanthis. Aside from the search for new occupational activities, the main focus in this process lay on education. Targeting primarily their own as well as other monastic orders and Brahmin candidates, and connecting partly with Gandhian patriotism, the prime idea became to develop models of a Hindu way of life impermeable to Westernization, and produce educated spiritual and social leaders for independent India and engage in social and political activities.

Keywords: Dādūpanthis, sant sampradaya, monastic, sadhus, Nāgā wing, Gandhian patriotism, Brahmin

The traditional education of Indian monks took place in personal interaction between a guru and his disciples. It, therefore, depended on the quality and motivation of both parties and the material conditions that would enable them to sustain the process of learning. Social conditions could boost or disturb the system. Such also was the case with the Dādūpanth, a 400-year-old sect of the Sant spectrum, which has its centre in Rajasthan, from where it spread to the

neighbouring regions. The monks of this sect usually joined a monastery at a very early age, as children or even as infants. They were given by their parents to a guru, out of devotion, in fulfilment of a vow or because they were too poor to protect their child from starving. The Dādūpanth was an affluent sect and had a distinguished literary and scholarly tradition. It had a wealthy clientele and was connected with the court of Jaipur, especially from the end of the eighteenth century. This drew many candidates for the monkhood, but especially the militant branch of the sect was also eager to attract boys for their rank and file as well as candidates for higher vocations besides mere utilitarian purposes. These circumstances implied that the candidates **(p.189)** had received no education besides the traditional social one when they joined a monastic branch.

The Dādūpanth emerged at the end of the sixteenth century, and has four branches of monks (*sādhū*), a small number of nuns (*sādhvī*), now also in the process of transformation, and a lay following. The number of monks has now shrunk to around 150, whereas in its heyday the sect had thousands of them. The steep decline of the monastic order is related to momentous structural changes taking place from the colonial period into the 1950s. These changes were addressed by the leaders of the monastic constituency by an attempt to launch reforms within the monastic constituency. While it proved to be a vain attempt to stay the impact of colonial and postcolonial modernity by internal monastic reforms, these reforms had an unintended effect: They eased the transition of a sect once dominated by sadhus into a post-sectarian fold of believers whose most active representatives are householders. With no specific sectarian agenda, these householders, however, point to Dādū and the Sants while battling for societal values which they see realized in their inherited religious tradition. In the twentieth century, the sect also created various religious and monastic corporate bodies of self-representation, which reflect the ways in which groups in the colonial period made their entrance into the public arena (Bouillier 2008). The debates on the fortunes of the sect were largely conducted on the board of such corporate bodies.

The monastic branches of the Dādūpanth can be distinguished by their different lifestyles. Let it suffice for the present purpose to distinguish between just two major categories, the monks attached to monasteries, but ideally peripatetic and closely interacting with the laity of their region, on the one hand, and the Nāgās, monks with a militant profile, whose loyalties were vested in the political powers, on the other.¹ From about the last third of the eighteenth century, the Dādūpanthī Nāgās had become attached to the court of Jaipur, first on an ad hoc basis, later on by forming a contingent of irregulars in the army of Jaipur State (Gold 1994; Hastings 2002; Orr 1947). With this, both recognition and wealth came to them. Into the twentieth century, the chief Nāgā leader was a member of Jaipur's courtly elite **(p.190)** and entitled to a seat in the royal assembly (*darbār*). The sectarian tradition of literature and learning, which is as old as the sect itself, benefited from the wealth of the Nāgās, and the Nāgā leaders

themselves cultivated the tastes of the Rajput elite and were both authors and patrons of literature and the arts. Conversely, any turn in the fortunes of the Nāgās affected the monastic constituency as a whole, materially and in terms of prestige, notwithstanding the fact that there always prevailed a tension between the ordinary sadhu lineages and the Nāgās.

The alarming changes in the fortunes of the Nāgās and thereby the sect as a whole set in with the establishment of British paramountcy ('Raj') in Rajputana (1818). Whereas in the final phase of the Mughal empire, their leaders had fought with their forces on the side of the king of Jaipur, the Nāgās' combatant function receded once Jaipur had become a British protectorate and the military monopoly of Jaipur State was monitored by the colonial power. Between 1818 and 1857, Nāgās were deployed to quell insurrections of regional chiefs against the king of Jaipur. During the Rebellion of 1857, they gained military prominence for the last time by standing firmly with Jaipur by the British. This was recognized by the Jaipur court, and the Raj and secured them a prestige that for some time went to conceal their in fact strained circumstances. After 1857, they slipped into military insignificance, while managing to retain their allowances and salaries, often with Nāgās on the payroll who existed only on paper. Fraudulence and low morale in their military establishments (*akhārās*), which were overstaffed with idling Nāgās, gave the court a lever against them. After a lengthy inquiry by the military department of Jaipur's administration, they were finally disbanded in 1938 by a state that wished to get rid of anachronistic elements in its modernizing army.² In 1932, 5,377 Nāgās and 29 managers (*bhaṇḍārī*) of Nāgā settlements were counted, those managers forming a wealthy monastic cadre.³ By 1937, 2,143 Nāgās were left on the roll. State grants helped around 1,800 of them to partly settle on land, partly to perform jobs in the police or as guards, while a mere 120 were **(p.191)** trained as army regulars. Educated Nāgās were also given clerical jobs in the Military Department. Under such auspices, it was clearly an unappealing option to be a celibate Nāgā. The decline of the constituency being rapid, traditions of learning were eroded and monks were perceived as uneducated, a band of wretches and pretenders. While the decline of the Dādūpanth is a fact, the image of it drawn by the administrative reports and also sectarian observers received its contours from the colonial discourse which set modernity against the outmoded indigenous. The ailing state of the sect, by and large correctly diagnosed and acknowledged by its leaders, was shocking for a monastic community that had contributed immensely to the culture of the region.

The final shattering blow to the sect came in the form of the abolition of the *jāgīrdārī* system in 1954 (see Rudolph and Rudolph 1984, 50–78). Like other monastic institutions, the various Dādūpanthī monastic lineages—Nāgās and non-Nāgās alike—had been recipients of state grants of revenue (*jāgīrs*), which implied the control of agricultural land and villages. Once the estates thriving on state grants were resumed against financial compensation by the state, the

sect's impact in the regional economy and society was severely curtailed. The monastic estates were reduced to their inalienable property of land. The former hold of Dādūpanthī monastic estates on the region was gone.

The signs of decline as they had started appearing and grew ever more alarming in the colonial period were not yet perceived by Dādūpanthī leaders as cataclysmic. Rather than realizing that the monastic system itself was shattered, they wished to cure the symptoms consisting in unsuitable candidates. At the beginning of the twentieth century and lagging somewhat behind the development in regions under direct colonial rule, a discourse on reform set in. This was conducted by reformers who pointed to the lack of education among monks as the cause of the sad state of the sect. This wrong diagnosis of a systemic disease was an offshoot of the wider colonial discourse. Indian reformers sought to save their traditional ideals—usually modern nationalistically coloured ideals read back into a golden past—by creating institutions of learning, the syllabus of which was designed to safeguard traditional values and learn to erect a bulwark against Western modernization. Though ostensibly **(p.192)** traditional, these institutions were in fact modern. Particularly the Ārya Samāj's neo-Vedic institutions served numerous religious orders as a model (Fischer-Tiné 2003). In due course, the Dādūpanth's move towards education received renewed momentum by the movement for Independence and especially Gandhian ideals. This made monks all over India embrace the ideal of *bhakti* for the nation. They engaged in social and political activities. This *deś-bhakti* (dedication to one's country) was seen as the timely version of *bhakti*. In Rajasthan, this development took again off somewhat belatedly because the princely states as British protectorates sought to muffle all that smacked of insurrection.

The education project was at first limited to the aim of ushering in internal reforms of the sect, whereas in the second decade of the twentieth century its scope widened. While still targeting the Dādūpanthī constituency and related monastic orders as well as Brahman candidates, the reforms came to be seen as the instrument which would groom monks and religiously trained Brahmans to become models of a Hindu way of life impermeable to Westernization. They would represent the type of Indians conforming to the nationalistic vision. While in the beginning the aim was to educate monks to safeguard the monastic branches of the sect, at a second, advanced stage the aim was to produce educated monks who would become builders of a modern independent India, independent also of Western cultural hegemony. These two phases are now largely history. Contrary to the intent of the authors of the reform programme, however, precisely these reforms were instrumental in a shift of the Dādūpanth from monastic to lay ideals, which are now, at the third, present stage being promoted by individuals who can be described as citizens committed to Dādūpanthī values interpreted in a societal vein. A lay constituency, most of them with their roots in the monastic tradition, forms the vanguard to which the

remaining monastic constituency accedes or at least does not oppose. All the three stages, which span the period between the 1890s and the present day, will be examined in the following.

The reform was initiated by a Dādūpanthī ayurvedic physician (*vaidya*), Svāmī Lakṣmīrām, who was the first to not only address the grievances, but also come up with an educational programme for monks (Maṅgaldās VS 1997). Born in 1873 into a Gaur Brahman **(p.193)** family in Jaipur district, he was initiated as a seven-year-old into an illustrious lineage, which had counted among its forebears the philosopher Nīscaldās, famous in his day and greatly admired by Dayānand Sarasvatī, the founder of the Ārya Samāj. Lakṣmīrām's guru was a scholarly man, and so the boy received a traditional Sanskrit education in philosophy, poetics, and some Āyurveda. The tradition of Āyurvedic healing had been ongoing in the Dādūpanth blending with traditions of folk medicine and soothsaying.⁴ Lakṣmīrām would later on be committed to purging Āyurveda from those admixtures. After his guru's death, the boy was looked after by another guru, who sent him to Maharaja Sanskrit College (Rājākīya Saṁskṛit College), which had been founded in 1852 with the aim:

to give specially Brahmins a regular course of instruction in all branches of Sanskrit learning, viz. Grammar, Philology, Philosophy, Logic, Literature, Mathematics[,] Astronomy, Medicine, the Veds and Vedic literature; and the titles Acharya, Shastri, and Upadhyay are conferred on successful students after systematic examinations conducted by eminent Sanskrit scholars from Benares and Calcutta. (Showers 1916, 93)⁵

Wed to the Brahmanic tradition, Sanskrit College targeted a totally different clientele than Jaipur's Maharaja's College, founded in 1844 to train the new administrative and professional elite of the colonial dispensation (Stern 1988, 158–61). At Maharaja Sanskrit College, the young monk studied eight years, but also taught himself from his sixth year of studies (1893). In those days, Āyurveda was just one of the subjects besides other fields of traditional learning to be mastered by a future *vaidya*. When his teacher died, Lakṣmīrām became his successor and eventually head of the department for the training of Āyurvedic physicians. He taught at the same institution for 40 years, retiring at the age of 60 (1933). Maharaja Sanskrit College was at that time the only college in Rajputana and neighbouring states to offer a systematic Āyurvedic training. Accordingly, Lakṣmīrām taught many generations of students from all over north India, and in Jaipur state, most ayurvedic dispensaries came to be run by former students of his **(p.194)** or, under different institutional auspices, by Svāmī Maṅgaldās, his former student. Many of the *vaidyas* in the region have been Dādūpanthi monks. Lakṣmīrām himself began practical work only during the last two years of his studies. Troubled by the absence of reliable editions of Āyurvedic Sanskrit sources, he engaged in projects of text edition. He militated against the contamination of Āyurveda by folk medicine, which some advocated

to bring medical treatment also to the villages.⁶ In 1919/20, he started stepping beyond the boundaries of tradition by supplementing Āyurvedic training by allopathic disciplines. Though he wanted students to be trained in anatomy, surgery, pathology, and obstetrics, he nonetheless rejected the allopathic concepts of health and disease. In introducing those allopathic disciplines, he initially failed because the allopathic terminology and English were alien to the students. The future Āyurvedic and allopathic physicians inhabited different worlds. Later on, however, Lakṣmīrām was able to introduce practicals at Maharaja Sanskrit College, a thing so far unheard of in Āyurveda, and some courses in the desired other subjects were taught by allopathic physicians.

Side by side with his teaching at Maharaja Sanskrit College, Lakṣmīrām developed his own Āyurvedic institution on land he had inherited from his guru. Inspired by a similar initiative launched by a Puṣṭimārgīya Gosvāmī of Kāmāṇ, he established in the heart of Jaipur an Āyurvedic pharmacy (1919, dispensary 1922, both still operating) and later on also an in-patient ward. Lakṣmīrām's diagnostic and healing skills were in great demand with the Rajput royalty near and far and the influential Marwari families. In this way, he accumulated great wealth, partly benefitting from a traditional system of patronage. Recognition came to him from all over India, as shown by his several honorary titles, and he was at the hub of various Āyurvedic societies. A traditional system of patronage combined with novel forms of lobbying for the profession thus characterized his approach. He converted his property into a trust, which, among other things, has supported the edition of Dādūpanthī literature.

By teaching at Maharaja Sanskrit College and thus within the limited scope of traditional higher education, he could not redress **(p.195)** the want perceived by him in the general education of sadhus. All the while firmly convinced that his was the age of education without which no sadhu could hope to attract followers and that education would cure the symptoms of consumption in the monastic constituency, he launched the project of a school and college. At its full-fledged stage, this came to be named Dādū Mahāvidyālay (DMV). His plans found the unanimous approval of the Dādūpanthī leadership. The school first opened on Dādūpanthī land in the coveted location of Rāmnivās Garden, close to a 'modern' school. The British authorities feared that the school would nourish and transmit like an infectious disease the spirit of rebellion against the British, and this is exactly what happened. Founded in 1920, the DMV was thus initially hampered, but in 1939 it eventually moved to its present premises on Moti Dungri Road, Jaipur. The ideology on which it was based rung in the speech of Mahāmahopādhyāy Giridhar Śarmā, principal of Maharaja Sanskrit College, at the inauguration ceremony of 1939:

The special virtues of our country have perished due to the defective scheme of English education. The mistakes of Western countries have been multiplied in this country. The trend towards individualism and pursuit of

individual interests is gaining momentum. Disregarding that which in apparel and sensibilities is genuinely Indian, foreignness is gaining ground. It can be said that in this trend only the institutions of Sanskrit education give reason for hope, because to some extent what is genuinely Indian is preserved in these⁷

Whereas Svāmī Lakṣmīrām had initiated the DMV, the man who implemented his school project, designed its educational concept, did most of the fund raising, and was as principal at the helm of affairs throughout all adversities, including the great scarcity during World War II, was Svāmī Maṅgaldās (1893–1981). He served as principal of DMV from its beginnings in 1920 to 1966, when he resigned from all functions to his native place Kucāman (Nagaur district, Rajasthan) where he also died, disgruntled for reasons germane to this chapter.

Svāmī Maṅgaldās was a person altogether different from Svāmī Lakṣmīrām. In the Dādūpanth, he is called the Tyāgmūrtī, ‘personification of self-denial’, and this needs to be taken in a religious and Gandhian political sense. Actually not a Dādūpanthī but a **(p.196)** Nirañjanī monk, he was the disciple of Svāmī Jānakīdās of Bikaner, but was to become one of the most distinguished representatives of the Dādūpanth of the twentieth century, and arguably its ablest organizer. When he was 21 years old, the young monk enrolled for ayurvedic studies at Maharaja Sanskrit College, whereby he became Svāmī Lakṣmīrām’s student. He passed not only the exam for the lowest grade, the Upādhyāy, but also completed his Śāstrī and Ācārya courses. Being a Gandhian and following his 1921 call for non-cooperation with the colonial power, he did, however, not sit for the exams, for non-cooperation included the rejection of degrees from colonial institutions. While Maharaja Sanskrit College was not a foundation of the British, the degrees were awarded by colleges in Benares and Calcutta that were under direct British rule. Besides attending to his other duties, he was also in charge of the Āyurvedic courses at DMV. He was Svāmī Lakṣmīrām’s right hand in the DMV project, and the DMV bore his stamp, which is not to belittle the impact of Svāmī Lakṣmīrām and two other devoted sadhus. Svāmī Maṅgaldās named as his principal aim the preservation of ‘sadhu-ness in the community of sadhus’ (Surjandās VS 2046, 5). In other words, he believed that the sect’s decline could be redressed. As he diagnosed, the young sadhus had learned little else but to pose as sadhus. Character building, removed from the evil influence of city life and Western culture, was therefore called for, and this was to be achieved by a course which featured grooming by physical exercise, manual work, including cooking and cleaning, and, of course, schooling from 4 a.m. to 9 p.m. Social equality was to be inculcated in the students, heirs apparent of *local abbots (mahant)* and ordinary sadhus were to be treated alike. Non-Dādūpanthī students came from the other monastic orders closely related to the Dādūpanth, namely the Rāmsnehi and the Nirañjanī sects. Non-sadhus were represented by Brahmans. Old ideals and a Gandhian nationalism converged in the ideals held by Svāmī Maṅgaldās. The standard of the DMV’s

Sanskrit training was higher than that of Maharaja Sanskrit College so that it drew students of this college who supplemented their training by private studies at the DMV. One of DMV's alumni, the Sanskrit scholar Svāmī Surjandās, became head of the Sanskrit Department of Jodhpur University, to demonstrate the rank of the institution by just one example.

(p.197) Svāmī Maṅgaldās soon became the leading figure in the Śrī Dādū [Dayāl] Mahāsabhā (DMS), which had been founded in 1917 to promote the sect's school project. The DMS came to form one of the main arenas of the battle between sadhu and householder Dādūpanthīs over the profile of the Dādūpanth. The DMS has continued holding its crucial position.

Before moving on to the development which led to the resignation of Svāmī Maṅgaldās from both the DMV and the DMS, the impact of the svami on the Dādūpanth may be summarized. By vocation a sadhu committed to Gandhian patriotism, endowed with extraordinary intellectual and organizational talent and determined to withdraw what was left of the Dādūpanth from the caprices and greed of individual Dādūpanthīs, he was instrumental in transferring the property of the DMV to a trust and thus preserving the institution. After his retirement in 1966, the brisk wind of renewal dropped. The fervour of India's freedom fighters and nation-builders which had inspired the svami had cooled down also in the DMV.

The svami was convinced that Sant literature had a message for the emerging new, a conviction he shared with a number of renowned intellectuals who made a mark in the field of scholarship. His Gandhian spirit is perhaps best expressed in his published poetry.⁸ For the library of the DMV he collected one of the two finest collections of Sant manuscripts, the other being that of Naraina.⁹ With similar energy and vision, the svami pursued the institutionalization of the Āyurvedic profession. The Indian Medicine Board, which **(p.198)** would give vaidyas official recognition and thus place them formally on a par with allopathic physicians, was founded on his initiative, and he also founded the Rājasthān Pradeś Vaidya Sammelan (Regional Society of Vaidyas).

It may be added that the reputation of the Dādūpanth in the field of Āyurveda, both promoted by Svāmī Lakṣmīrām and Svāmī Maṅgaldās, was eventually conducive to Lakṣmīrām's grand-disciple Rāmprakāś Svāmī becoming the first director of the National Institute of Ayurveda (NIA) at Jaipur, founded in 1976.¹⁰

Why then did Svāmī Maṅgaldās resign disgruntled from both the DMV and the DMS in 1966? This opens the view on deep, irreparable rift between sadhus and householders of the period. For centuries, the Dādūpanth had seen itself as a community primarily of sadhus. Now, under the impact of modernity with the back against the wall, it was not yet in a position to assess the future adequately. Svāmī Maṅgaldās felt antagonized by the increasing influence of the

householders on the boards of both institutions. It may be inferred that these were not ordinary householders, that is, lay followers of the sect, but sadhus-turned-householders in the process sketched earlier. By the remaining sadhus they were derogated as deviant characters. These sadhus were misunderstanding the vigour of the tide of modernity and rather blamed the landslide changes in the sect on individual defaulters.

The transformation, however, also affected the monks. While considering the structural transformation from a sadhu to householder community, one should ignore the cases of random personal choice on the part of the individual concerned, and focus on the process of transformation to which to adjust monastic leaders actively encouraged their disciples. This required farsightedness and diplomatic skills, for it involved the transfer of property and fair decision on who should succeed to the position of the candidate turning householder, for in many cases, these candidates were the ablest disciples or even **(p.199)** nominated official heirs apparent within lineages. Examining the evidence at this author's disposal, the transformation was, unsurprisingly, most successful in cases where there was such property available to ease a candidate's start in civil life. Some sort of material basis and, once again, education were the prerequisites which eased the transformation. For the rank and file of the Nāgās, no such assets were forthcoming. The privileged elite, however, sadhus-turned-householders, made its impact on the Dādūpanth. To sum up, by 1966, the sadhus had realized that they were swimming against the tide and saw the sect precipitating towards extinction. To them, the Dādūpanth was primarily a community of sadhus, and the number of these was indeed constantly falling.

The men who turned householders occupy an intermediate position between sadhu and ordinary householder. One wonders if this intermediate status will be carried over into the generation next to theirs. An intermediate status between sadhu and householder is found to prevail also with other householders descended from a monastic tradition.¹¹ If anything, the way in which the transition has taken place shows the capacity of the sect to adjust itself to change. The individuals turned householders and their families emphasize their religious roots and their responsibility to reform the Dādūpanthī community to preserve the message of the founder and the numerous distinguished Dādūpanthīs from sinking into oblivion. In so doing, they point to the formative period of the sect when the formation of the sadhu community was accidental rather than planned by Dādū. This goes to demolish the image that sadhus used to have of themselves as *the original and chief stalwarts of the sect*, and hagiographical testimonies in support or rejection of this view are played off against each other. The new householder elites carry their project of the reform of the community into the public arena. The most spectacular acts of public

appearance are a sacred journey and a mass wedding to assist their economically underprivileged co-religionists.

The clash of Svāmī Maṅgaldās with the ascendant householders is somewhat tragic, for not a few of them were inspired by the same Gandhian ideals as the Svāmī. The transformation can be exemplified **(p.200)** by a case narrative of a Nāgā, who rose to prominence on the board of both the DMV and the DMS.¹² The late Hanumāndās Svāmī was president of the DMS for some time and from the years 1983–4 until an unknown year permanent member of the board of DMV.¹³ His biography is an example, albeit one of outstanding distinction, in the consecutive stages of modernizing and laicization of the Dādūpanth.¹⁴ Hanumāndāsji, who still bore the title of Thāmbhāyat of an akhārā of the Lālsot Jamāt of Nāgās, that is, the head of a Dādūpanthī Nāgā lineage, was born in 1923. He resigned from the position of main disciple of his guru in 1951, when he got married, by this complying with the wish of his guru. His responsibilities were transferred to another disciple, who, however, at some point also resigned the monkhood. Critically ill as an infant of one year and a half, Hanumāndāsji had been dedicated to the Dādūpanth by his grandmother and was adopted into that Nāgā lineage of Udairāmji of Sānodiā near Jobner. This was at a time when the Nāgās were still a regiment of the army of Jaipur state. When he was eleven years old, his guru sent him to Jaipur, where he was staying with a Jain friend of his guru, to whom Hanumāndāsji would later on pay a touching tribute in the form of a religious poem. A student of Urdu and Hindi, he further proceeded to Amritsar to study with the Dādūpanthī scholar Hanumān Śāstrī and returned to Jaipur with the title Hindī Prabhākar (from Lahore). At the age of thirteen, he was put to a clerical job at the Military Department of Jaipur, and since the Nāgās had been disbanded in 1938, he worked for the Revenue Department and became municipal clerk in 1940. In 1947, he received a grant for a ten-month course of village industry training at the Gandhi Ashram at Wardha. He returned with the title Grāmodyogvinīt and became supervisor of the Corporate Society of Paper Producers of Jaipur State at Sanganer. From 1956 to 1966, he was chief organizer village industries at the Khadi Board. He was the organizer of Vinobha Bhave's *bhūdān* (land gifting) and foot pilgrimage campaign in Rajasthan, vice-president of the Cow **(p.201)** Cooperatives, and president of the DMS, apart from also earning the degree of Sāhitya Ratna of the Hindī Sāhitya Sammelan and a BA from Rajasthan University. He put the greater part of the land he had inherited from his guru into a trust and gave it on lease to a charitable trust that built and runs a modern hospital on it, which in fact has earned an excellent reputation for itself. This biography reflects the typical way of recruitment into the Dādūpanthī monkhood, transition the Nāgās underwent in the 1930s, the openness and farsightedness of his guru as it was produced in a distinguished Nāgā lineage, as well as the twentieth century's major themes of social reform in a national spirit: Gandhi's ideals, the commitment to Hindi as a national language, small-scale industry as an alternative economic programme, the

bhūdān movement, scholarship as an instrument of the self-assertion of a new India, and an earnest social commitment.

Hanumān Svāmī retired from ceremonial functions, but in 2003, he participated as a distinguished guest at the installation (*cādar dastūr* and *bhaṇḍārā*) for the new abbot of Nivāi after the demise of Mahant Rāmprasādjī. The abbot of Nivāi is considered the chief of all Dādūpanthī Nāgās, for by his lineage forebear the relationship with the court of Jaipur had been established in the late eighteenth century. Hanumāndās Svāmī's house was the informal meeting point of scholars working on the Dādūpanth, and a good number of academic publications and charitable projects of the sect were sponsored by him and in later years by his son Aśok, to whom he passed on the baton. Aśok, charismatic like his father, but otherwise a quite different person, represents the spearhead of the modernizers of the ex-Nāgā constituency and has managed to rally around himself also Dādūpanthī lay followers of a different spectrum as well as monks. A business man, he used to be joint secretary of the DMS, and became the society's secretary. Two of his projects have been realized in the public arena, one has taken place annually for the last fifteen years while the other has so far represented a singular event. As for the first one, this is a foot pilgrimage from Amer to Bhairana. Amer is a place where Dādū lived for sixteen years, and Bhairana is the place of Dādū's funeral. The aim of the four-day pilgrimage, which requires the mobilization of funds and local communities, who extend their hospitality to several thousand pilgrims, is to remind people inside and outside of the Dādūpanth of the message of Dādū. Derived from this message is the thrust on (i) equality of all religions, (ii) striving for the equality (p.202) of castes and the spirit of brotherhood, and (iii) emphasis on God as supreme truth beyond form. Inherently, this programme is a critique of caste discrimination and iconic Hinduism, the impact of which on the Dādūpanth Aśok Svāmī wishes to restrain (Horstmann 2008, 352).

The concluding function of the pilgrimage takes place in the presence of the abbot-in-chief, the ācārya of the Dādūpanth, abbots, and office holders of the sect and the DMS. In his concluding speech of the pilgrimage of 2004, the ācārya commented on two lines from couplets of Dādū,

Do away with your ego, worship Hari, get rid of the corruption of your body and mind,

Practice peaceableness towards your own soul—this in essence is the teaching regarding religious practice.¹⁵

This, he said, is the essence of what the Sants had taught since the sixteenth century, this remains also what keeps Indian culture going. The religious validity of the caste structure of Indian society was denied by the Sants. They sought enlightenment and dispelled ignorance. Peace cannot be brought about but by

the truthfulness of those Saints. To bring this to attention, the sacred journey and procession is held every year (Horstmann 2008, 348).

This exegesis, which with its thrust on social values does perhaps not quite reflect what Dādū had in mind, underlines that the sect has left the confines of the monkhood and sees its role rather as a champion of equality, peace, and enlightened religion. The Dādūpanth had to go a long way, indeed, to arrive at this programme no longer predicated on the monkhood.

The other publicly performed display of the Dādūpanthī leaders' determination to address social problems was a mass wedding organized by the Jan Cetanā Samiti, also a brainchild of those who share Hanumāndās Svāmī's and his son's vision of sectarian modernity. The wedding took place in 2003 on the premises of the Lālsoṭ Jamāt, the Nāgā lineage of the Svāmī family.¹⁶ It was organized to give **(p.203)** ex-Nāgā families financial assistance for the wedding of their sons and daughters. The organizers initially envisaged 30 to 35 couples, whereas eventually 67 couples enrolled, the side of the bride and bridegroom each contributing a modest 5,100 rupees. The rest of the total expenses of some 1,129,000 rupees, including the basic household equipment for each of the couples, were covered by donations. Also, ex-Nāgās who could have well afforded individual weddings expressed their solidarity by celebrating their children's weddings in this way. The chairman of the function was a Dādūpanthī mahant.

For Nāgās, the need to modernize was especially pressing because of the sheer numbers of those affected by the changes pointed out and because of the impact of this on the sect as a whole. Their plight could hardly be explained as collective laxness with regard to celibacy and accordingly dismissed as self-inflicted. Though for many years defamed, Dādūpanthī Nāgās-turned-householders have in fact been able to initiate renewal in a sect which had been dominated for three centuries by a monastic elite.

The profile of Āśok Svāmī would be incomplete without mentioning that he has taken out his social engagement beyond the confines of his own religious group. The latest evidence of this is his successful move of a public interest litigation for the diversion of heavy traffic from the route running through Sanganer in the south of Jaipur (decided by the Supreme Court in January 2012).¹⁷

As for the social mobility of former Nāgās, the case of father and son of that Svāmī family is not unique. Similarly, individuals from families descending from the traditional Nāgā elite have fared very well in the professions. Typically, the Nāgā abbots enabled them to launch their careers and make the transition from monk to householder. One of the spectacular cases I have witnessed in my own lifetime is the transition made by the chief disciple of the late Rāmprasādjī, the abbot of Nivāī, who himself had still graced the Jaipur darbar. He had picked up

that disciple from his grandmother when the boy was a mere infant. He groomed him to become a *khaṇḍet*, that is, an expert in the Dādūpanthī martial arts. While this took place under the supervision of the abbot and senior *khaṇḍets* in the akhārā of Rāmprasādji's ancient mansion in Jaipur, the young man was at the **(p.204)** same time a student of medicine and was to become a renowned psychiatrist. Rāmprasādji thus prepared him for a life in the world and eventually arranged his marriage with a girl descended from another ex-Nāgā family. As chief chemist and head of the chemistry department at Jaipur's Albert Hall Museum, she too is a representative of the elite. Finally, anticipating a pathetic decline of the Nivāi lineage after his demise, Rāmprasādji, who died in 2003, converted the property of his lineage into a trust with his disciple-turned-householder as sole trustee.

These examples could easily be multiplied. They show that a successful transition from monk to householder could most easily take place in the former Nāgā elite. They benefited from the system of modern education that was made accessible to them by monastic leaders, who, while themselves representatives of traditional learning and, for at least one of them, a member of the former courtly elite, wished their disciples to attain mobility in a society no longer honouring passed monastic glory. Many of those who made a remarkable career in the professions or, in a much more restricted local context, as Āyurvedic physicians were former students of the DMV. In other words, the reforms once launched for the uplift of sadhus had helped make sadhus the transition into a decent householder life, much against the intention of the monastic reformers. Their visions, actually the vain attempt to set back the clock of modernity, had been thwarted by reality.

What, finally, happened in the meantime at the main seat (*gaddī*, lit. 'cushion throne') of the sect? The 19th ācārya of the Dādūpanth, Harirāmji, a scholarly man of great personal integrity and humility, was an alumnus of DMV. Three of his disciples were especially close to him. He made Gopāldāsji, also an alumnus of DMV, his successor. Though the nomination of a *gaddī*'s heir apparent is a formal act of investiture, Harirāmji once again confirmed his decision in his will. His eldest disciple, Puruṣottamdās Svāmī, an Āyurvedic practitioner, had married in 1987 with the ācārya's consent and was given by him his part of his guru's heirloom.¹⁸ The land he built his house on is **(p.205)** part of the huge property surrounding the sectarian headquarters. Accordingly this disciple has spent all his married life under the observation of the sect and its followers. Not a few envy him his property and status, for he continued being close to the ācārya and involved in the management of the temple, all the while running his ayurvedic pharmacy and also travelling to preach to local communities. The third disciple, Brahmaprakāś Svāmī, is also from a Nāgā lineage and holds an MA degree in Hindi. Ācārya Harirāmji himself, he told me, encouraged him to get married to a girl from an ex-Nāgā family, herself a PhD in art history. Against the resistance and to the chagrin of Gopāldāsji, his co-disciple from childhood

and since Harirāmji's death in 2001 the 20th ācārya on the main gaddī, Brahmaprakāś's wedding took place in 2003. The most powerful symbol of the reconciliation of the two opposite modes of life that have been emerging from within the monkhood took place at the funeral of Harirāmji. All the three disciples joined in dressing the body of the ācārya for the funeral procession, at which the dead ācārya, seated in a bier formed like a sedan chair, gives a last *darśan*, sight of himself, to his following. According to the sect's tradition, the dressing of the body of the deceased abbot of Naraina takes place in an open pillared hall on the temple premises where after a century of decline and finally a schism in the Dādūpanth its reform was agreed upon in 1750. It is thus a sacred symbol of reconciliation. At the cremation, the three disciples together performed on their guru the important last rite by which the soul of the deceased is released (*kapāla-kriyā*, 'breaking of the skull') and the dead man enabled leave this world behind. All the three—a sadhu, a sadhu-turned-householder, and another sadhu on the verge of turning householder—held on to the rod with which this rite is performed. The honour of carrying on his head the urn with a part of the ācārya's ashes—another part being committed to his cenotaph—and immersing them in the Ganges at Haridvār fell to the one who was not yet but would very soon be married. Despite his leaving the monkhood by marriage, he has retained his confidential status, being largely responsible the organization of the annual festival of the sect at the headquarters of Naraina.

(p.206) Meanwhile Gopāldāsji, the incumbent on the main gaddī since 2001, who from his childhood had been a disciple of the late ācārya, after his installation was nonetheless the first to confirm his position amidst the various factions within the sect. The fact that the will of his guru was published by Jāt patrons of the gaddī may point to some uncertainty, may be an apprehended imminent conflict over caste, for Harirām the Gaur Brahman had groomed a Jāt for successor (Caudharī 2001, 211–12). Besides the factions introduced in the foregoing, there are also other groups who demand the ācārya's attention, namely wealthy patrons from the business world, investing in the Dādūpanth for various reasons of their own and also representing various regional traditions. All of them claim that the late ācārya had encouraged them to do what they are now pursuing with zeal according to their own understanding of the common good. The first breeze of change this author noticed in 2004 at the concluding function of the pilgrimage mentioned earlier when the ācārya by quoting words of Dādū confirmed the aims pronounced by the organizers of the pilgrimage. Prior to this, this author had not heard him espouse so unequivocally the aims of the new lay elite, who are clearly inspired by a sense of civic responsibility. In that concluding speech, he presented himself as a trustee of the legacy of Dādū that had the capacity of making a contribution to civil society. The question was, however, if he would also respond in action to the rapid change within, or rather dissolution of the monastic constituency of, his sect? When I went to the sect's

headquarters in 2010, I noticed a good number of unfamiliar young faces. I asked the ācārya who these were. ‘Students’, he replied, ‘they stay with us. We have plenty of space and the means to support them. We pay for their schooling’. And he went on explaining that, as the monastic tradition had all but vanished, a new generation of lay followers needed to be groomed to carry on the message of Dādū so that it continue bearing fruit in society. These boys came from ordinary householder families with no particular sectarian record who had sought the support of an institution that had retained the aura of an estate dominant in the region. Little will the schooling and future role of these boys in society resemble that which the makers of the DMV had in mind for their alumni.¹⁹

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Notes:

(¹) For the monastery in the Hindu tradition, see Bouillier (2009).

(²) For the reform of Jaipur's army, see Sarkar (1984, 381–5).

(³) Mahakma Khas, Jaipur, File M-1 'Question of Reorganisation of Nagas, State Secretary's Office' (transcript, G.C. Varma, Jaipur, 1976).

(⁴) Lakṣmīrām's guru is described to have been an expert of *ariṣṭa* (signs of approaching death).

(⁵) The Āyurvedic department was started in 1865.

(⁶) On debates over the profile of Āyurveda in contemporary India, see Wujastyk (2008).

(⁷) Surjandās (VS 2009, 135) (my translation).

(⁸) Surjandās (VS 2046, 1–384) (separate pagination). The svami was indeed a scholar. Only a fraction of the numerous editions of Sant texts that he made have been published, among these an excellent edition of the *Dādūvāṇī* and, without exception based on unpublished manuscripts, the works of other Dādūpanthī authors, some of them of considerable difficulty. In Kucāman, where he lived from 1966 until his death, the unpublished manuscripts of Svāmī Maṅgaldās are now untraceable, though his memory is still venerated (visit of the author in December 2010). The DMV has not preserved any unpublished material authored by him.

(⁹) When the library of DMV happened to be flooded, its stupefied authorities were not able to appropriately conserve it. The holdings have been only recently examined, put in order, and catalogued anew by Brajmohan Mīnā, chief researcher, Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, Jaipur branch.

(¹⁰) The Āyurvedic department of the Maharaja Sanskrit College grew into a regular Ayurvedic College in 1946. This was superseded by the National Institute Ayurveda, Jaipur (www.indiaprofile.com/ayurveda/ayurvedainstitute.htm). See also Rāmprakāś Svāmī's tribute to Svāmī Maṅgaldās in which he points more than obliquely to the infighting that went on in that college, as it seems between a more conservative and a progressive faction (Surjandās VS 2046, 2–3, separate pagination).

(¹¹) For an *ex-samnyāsī* example, see Thiel-Horstmann (1986). In that case, the ascribed double status was inherited from an unspecified past.

(¹²) I have referred to him briefly in Horstmann (2008, 352).

(¹³) *Jñānāñjali* (1983–4, n.p.) (back of the title-page); Saṃcālan Samiti 1985, 28.

(¹⁴) All information comes from Hanumāndāsī Svāmī himself. The interviews were conducted by me and supplemented by additional information gathered by Sharatchandra Ojha, whose cooperation I gratefully acknowledge.

(¹⁵) Dādū, *sākhīs* 29.2ab and 3ab (Dādū [V.S. 2026]).

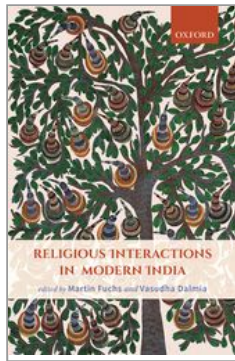
(¹⁶) Nāgās observe *jamāt* (localized lineage of Nāgās) endogamy and akhārā exogamy. Also Rāmavats, Nirañjanīs, Rāmsnehīs, and Vaiṣṇavas are eligible for marriage (communication by Aruna Svami, 2 March 2004).

(¹⁷) *Times of India*, Jaipur, 19 January 2012.

(¹⁸) He is neither a monk, nor a *gharbārī* (living in his own house), nor an ordinary *grhasth* (married householder), but represents a type of monk in the transition from the monkhood to the ordinary *grhasth* status, though it remains to be examined if that transitory state will have an impact of the status of the next or even later future generations.

(¹⁹) Since the first presentation of this article, the DMV has been closed down.

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Secularizing Renunciation?

Swami Shraddhananda's Welcome Address at the Congress Session of Amritsar in 1919

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Abstract and Keywords

Focusing on Swami Shraddhananda (1857–1926), the chapter discusses the turn towards an ideal of political *samnyasi*-hood in the early twentieth century. With Gandhi, Shraddhananda shared the conviction that the regeneration of India could only be achieved through a personal disciplinary regime. Paying particular attention to the speech Shraddhananda gave at the session of the Indian National Congress in Amritsar in 1919, the chapter demonstrates his understanding of the public function of a modern samnyasi. Shraddhananda had ordained himself samnyasi in 1917. While traditionally a samnyasi renounced his social role, Shraddhananda conceived of a samnyasi in his days as one who uses his independence to become a responsible actor in social and political matters, doing *seva*, service, for the whole world, and working for the liberation of the nation. The author embeds her analysis in a specific understanding of secularization following which values and forms of institutionalization can be transferred from the religious to the secular sphere.

Keywords: Swami Shraddhananda, political samnyasi-hood, Indian National Congress, Amritsar, *seva*, secularization, secular sphere

For social scientists, secularization is not a homogeneous process but rather a wide range of developments in the course of which religious ideas cease to become significant forces in social life, their weakening hold on the lives of individuals coincides with the latter's aspiration to an autonomy of judgement in

spheres which earlier had been under the control of religious authorities (Beckford 2003, 35–72).¹ In the final analysis, the theories of secularization rest on the thesis of differentiation put forward by Max Weber which itself refers back to the division of the Christian order into two spheres: the religious sphere, corresponding to the Church, and the secular world proper (*saeculum*). In this Christian conception, secular designated the worldly sphere within the all-encompassing reality of the Christian order, in which all human activities—both religious and secular—took place. For all practical purposes, the Christian sphere, within which the secular had its specific place, was confounded with the domain of the Church. Once the processes of secularization set **(p.210)** in, the secular world became the encompassing reality and the religious sphere had to adapt to it (Casanova 1994, 12–17). In the original Christian conception, however, secularization did not refer to the decline of religious influence or to the privatization of religion. One spoke of secularization, for example, when a priest was released from his vows; he returned to the world after having obtained a ‘brief of secularisation’ from the pope. A comparable form of secularization was also at work when, over time, ideas, values, as well as forms of social organization were transferred from the religious to the secular sphere. A similar transfer is still at work when modern-day moralists speak of elaborating a code of duty based on a reformulation of the Christian message that claims fidelity to evangelical values without profession of Christian faith.² It is this understanding of secularization that I have in mind in this chapter, albeit I am not looking at Christian but at Hindu material. I am arguing that between 1905 and 1920, at a crucial period of the Indian struggle for independence from the colonial regime, renunciation as a Hindu value was given a new lease of life by being seriously envisaged as a mode of intervention into the public sphere. The association of politics with detachment calls to mind Gandhi. And Gandhi can indeed be expected to figure in good place in what follows given the period under scrutiny. But I will be considering another major actor of the period: Swami Shraddhananda (1857–1926), the well-known disciple of Swami Dayananda Sarasvati (1824–83).

My enquiry is limited in time and scope. It revolves around the public speech that Swami Shraddhananda delivered at the end of December 1919 as the president of the Reception Committee of the annual meeting of the Indian National Congress at Amritsar (Punjab) (Bhāratīya 1987d, 153–66).³ This session took stock of what had been a most eventful year. For many Indians, 1919 had started both with a promise of greater political responsibility, through the introduction of limited self-government in British India (Montagu–Chelmsford **(p.211)** Reforms), and with a threat of humiliation, through the adoption of the anti-sedition Rowlatt Act, which vested the colonial government with extraordinary powers to silence the press and arrest suspected political activists without trial. By March 1919, the outcome of these ambivalent colonial decisions was the first pan-Indian struggle against the British colonial rule under the

leadership of Gandhi. Shraddhananda took a leading part in it. True to his forceful style, the Aryasamaji leader inaugurated the Amritsar Congress session with a long welcome address (in Hindi), speaking with unrestrained emotion of his participation in the nationwide anti-Rowlatt protest. Jordens has shown that Shraddhananda's political role was primarily motivated by religious reasons (Jordens 1981, chapter V).⁴ In this chapter, I intend to probe deeper into the exact nature of his religious motivations by looking closely at his speech in Amritsar, though my enquiry is not strictly limited to this event. The one question that will occupy me in particular is the fact that in 1917, the prominent Punjabi leader of the Arya Samaj had become a Hindu renouncer (*saṃnyāsī*). How then did he reconcile his political involvement with his renunciation? What sort of renouncer was he, and what sort of renunciation did he have in mind when he addressed the Congress delegates?

Standing in his ochre-coloured dress on the platform of the Indian National Congress, Shraddhananda offered the thousands of delegates of India's most secular political organization the symbolically charged sight of a Hindu renouncer known for his uncompromising religious radicalism. But then, was it not a time when national unity prevailed over all other considerations? Since the first days of March, ideological and religious differences had given way to a unanimous and nationwide opposition to the Rowlatt legislation. Hundreds of **(p.212)** personalities and less-known Indians had joined Gandhi's satyagraha, signing the pledge (or vow) of passive resistance to the oppressive laws that Gandhi had communicated to the press on 1 March 1919:

Being conscientiously of the opinion that the Bills known as the Indian Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill No. 1 of 1919 and the Criminal Law (Emergency Powers) Bill No. 2 of 1919 are unjust, subversive of the Principle of liberty and justice and destructive of the elementary rights of individuals, on which the safety of the community as a whole and the State itself is based, we solemnly affirm that in the event of these Bills becoming law and until they are withdrawn, we shall refuse civilly to obey those Laws and such other Laws as a Committee to be hereafter appointed may think fit, and we further affirm that in this struggle we will faithfully follow the truth and refrain from violence to life, person or property. (Mittra 1921, 34)

To the surprise of all—the colonial government and Indian political leaders alike—Hindu-Muslim fraternization was widespread, the pan-Indian struggle uniting all sections of Indians irrespective of caste, class, and religion. In this unexpected display of solidarity, Shraddhananda, who had a sense of theatrics, got to play a dramatic role when on Friday, the 4th of April, he was brought to the Jama Masjid by Muslim authorities and invited to address the faithful who were holding a mourning prayer. What had earned him their respect was his cool-blooded conduct during the tragic events of 30 March, the day the capital of

India had gone on a general strike to protest against the new laws.⁵ But though he had protected Hindus and Muslims alike by keeping the crowd and the police in check, several people had still been killed and now the people of Delhi, Hindus and Muslims united, were mourning their martyrs. That was why on 4 April the very man, whose Aryasamaji offensive and proselytizing activities had played no small part in worsening the inter-communal relations in his native Punjab, could now be seen speaking from the pulpit of the largest mosque of Delhi in his monastic apparel (Jordens 1981, 109). Later, on the Congress platform at Amritsar, he would recall emotionally how he had become a living symbol of Hindu-Muslim fraternization. But while expressing his yearning for complete national unity, **(p.213)** which in India always implies communal harmony, Shraddhananda squarely grounded his plea in Hindu rhetoric at the risk of upsetting his audience. Now that the events of Delhi had united Hindus and Muslims, he said, could not one hope for ever greater national unity by integrating the Christians as well, just like the holy site of Prayag (Allahabad) united three rivers (Gaṅgā, Yamunā, and Sarasvatī), and once it had been achieved would not this unity lay the ground for a new political rule?

If the Sarasvatī too could get mingle in the confluence [*saṅgama*] of the Gaṅgā and the Yamunā, then the holy [*pavitra*] Prayag would be made whole, and with the meeting of the Hindu, Muslim and Christian peoples [*jana-samājom*] the divisions of Bhārata would be removed and the basis [*jaḍa*] of the British empire [*sāmrājya*] would fall into the underworld [*pātāla*] laying the true foundation [*buniyād*] of a universal ruler's kingdom [*cakravartī rājya*] in this world [*saṃsāra*]. (Bhāratīya 1987d, 154)⁶

As all Congress delegates present at Amritsar knew it was not in Delhi, but in the Punjab that the highest level of protest against the Rowlatt Act and the worst violence of the British had occurred with the 13 April massacre at Jallianwala Bagh, the bombing of Gujranwala the next day, the immediate imposition of martial law on the whole province (to be lifted only on 11 June), and the arrest of thousands of people. But for Shraddhananda, the original cause of these events, which had shaken Punjab (and the whole of India), was to be found in the capital itself. Had not Delhi been the political stage where he had made his first public appearance? As another manifestation of his paradoxical way of pleading for communal fraternization, here is how he linked the fate of both Delhi and the Punjab for the benefit of the Congress delegates:

I now come to this episode [that is, the Jallianwala Bagh massacre], which has drawn you here from all the corners of our country. It is not necessary to repeat here what trial the country has gone through. The origin [*buniyād*] of this event, which from the pure old land [*purānī pāk sarjamīn*] of the Five-Rivers [*pañcanāda*, that is, Punjab] has brought back to our memory the atrocities committed by Gengis Khan and **(p.214)** Nadir Shah, can be found in Delhi itself, in the capital of India—the real capital as

well as the one that has been made so [by the British]. In the afternoon of 30th March 1919, when the first bullet was fired, people knew that this country, which has been called weak [*bejān*], was full of vigour [*jān*]. Did not the evidence presented to the Hunter Commission [a committee set up by the British to inquire into the events in Punjab that was still cross-examining the witnesses at the time] make this clear? Thanks to this minium [*sadiyom* that is, vermillion colour], we know that in this sleepy nation a genuine mood of heroism was also asleep, it had not died. It is on the soil of the ancient capital of the Paṇḍavas that the first blood for the revival [*punaruddhāra*] of Bhāratavarṣa was shed, and with the minium [*sadiyom se*] of this blood the separated hearts of the main sons of Bhāratamātā, that is Hindus and Muslims, have been reconciled. ... Came the day of April 4, when in the Jama Masjid of Delhi God displayed his glory [*śān*]. Afterwards until the night of the 18th of April (as long as the police did not establish its rule again), it was Rāmrajya in the town of Delhi. It is a fact that from the early morning of March 3 till the evening of April 18 no lock was broken, there was no fighting, no cutting of pocket—not only that, the gambling-houses remained closed, unusual men were seen in the drinking places, and the well-known bullies treated ladies like their sisters, mothers and daughters and allowed them safe-conduct [*abhayadāna*]. This breeze full of love [*prema-mayī*] spread from Delhi to the Punjab. The waves of unity and union lighted up the whole region like electricity. There was no difference [*bheda*] anymore between temple [*mandira*] and mosque [*masjid*]. (Bhāratīya 1987d, 160–1)

In December 1919, Shraddhananda was a new player on the Indian political stage. By joining Gandhi in his Rowlatt satyagraha right from the beginning of the movement, he had surprised his entourage considerably precisely because until then he had sharply criticized anti-colonial political agitation, targeting in particular the Congress members—those ‘drawing room politicians’ (Shraddhanand 1946, 29).⁷ Until then he had tirelessly portrayed the Arya Samaj as a purely religious organization, a claim equally questioned tirelessly by the British officials since the involvement of Lajpat Rai (1865–1928) and other Punjabi Aryasamajis in the disturbances that had erupted in **(p.215)** the Punjab after the Bengal partition.⁸ Lajpat Rai and Shraddhananda had stood at opposite ends on this issue. But Shraddhananda’s own educational project at his Gurukul of Kangri (near Haridvar) also raised suspicion, some British officials suspecting that its real intention was to foster anti-Muslim as well as anti-Western attitudes likely to contribute to dangerous political agitation.⁹

If Shraddhananda’s acquaintances were surprised by his entry into politics, it was also because he had just sent out a strong signal of having definitely turned his back to the ways of the world. For in 1919, it had only been two years that he had pronounced religious vows (*saṃnyāsa*), replaced his civil name, Munshi Ram, by the renouncer title and name of *svāmī* (‘master’) Shraddhananda

(‘felicity of faith’), and donned the ochre-coloured dress of renunciation. It was also that he had manifested a strong inclination towards renunciation even before that ceremony. In 1902, he had given up a successful career as a pleader to run the Gurukul, the educational institution which he had founded ‘on the lines of the ancient Brahmacharya Ashram’. The reference was to the first stage of life (*āśrama*) of the Brahmanical tradition, implying for the students a daily conduct associated with chastity (*brahmacarya*), vegetarianism, and strict discipline (Shraddhanand 1946, 30).¹⁰ Adopting for himself an equally austere **(p.216)** regimen and choosing not to remarry after the death of his wife—a clear indication of his having relinquished the householder stage and of his disposition towards renunciation—he had dedicated his life to social and educational work, placing in them his hopes for India’s regeneration rather than in political activities regarding which he maintained a deliberately aloof stand (Shraddhanand 1946, 42). One could, of course, argue that to demonstrate aversion to politics is not devoid of political significance. It was understandably with a certain degree of surprise that Shraddhananda’s entourage saw him entering into the sphere of politics behind Gandhi.

In order to understand Shraddhananda’s behaviour, it is necessary to bear in mind the nature of his relationship with Gandhi. They corresponded since 1914 after C.F. Andrews (1871–1940) had introduced them to each other—the Anglican priest, who had been close to the Indian National Congress, was one of Munshi Ram’s bosom friends (Jordens 1981, 90–3). They had first met in 1915 when Gandhi paid a visit to the Gurukul (Shraddhanand 1946, 6). At that time they discovered their spiritual affinity and their common conviction that national independence had to be premised on the regeneration of India, which, in turn, could only be achieved through a personal disciplinary regimen. Self-control—in particular through strict chastity—they both held to be the key to the control of external forces.¹¹

According to his son Indra, with whom he was closely associated, Shraddhananda would not have entered the field of politics if Gandhi had not started the satyagraha movement (Jordens 1981, 107). It is likely that the Gandhian method suited him because, combining as it did total commitment and sincere disinterestedness, it was poles apart from ‘drawing-room’ politics. It was a new way of doing politics **(p.217)** that engaged the complete person just as religion did. The religious dimension of Shraddhananda’s motivation is manifest in the wording of the telegram he sent to Gandhi on 4 March 1919 to inform him of his support in the Rowlatt satyagraha:

Have signed Satyagrah vow just now. Glad to join this Dharma Yudha.
(Shraddhanand 1946, 48)¹²

Shraddhananda's image of Gandhi was clearly idealized. That Gandhi equally idealized Shraddhananda becomes explicit in the terms he used in December 1919 to encourage him to accept the presidency of the Reception Committee of the coming session of the Indian National Congress: 'You will be able to introduce Dharmic feelings within the Congress' (Shraddhanand 1946, 103). Until then, Shraddhananda had been reluctant to preside over the Congress Reception Committee for reasons he later recalled:

I was still undecided and had written to Mahatma Gandhi for advice, because prominent Hindus and Aryasamajis were dissuading me from degrading Sanyas by entering the arena of politics. (Shraddhanand 1946, 102)

This remark speaks volumes about, on one hand, the valourisation of renunciation and, on the other hand, the negative connotation of politics in Shraddhananda's own milieu. For many Aryasamajis, the religious and political spheres were to be kept carefully distinguished, since they perceived them as mutually contradictory. Whereas Gandhi wanted not only to reduce the gap between them, but also to articulate them. Shraddhananda did not readily adopt his point of view because of his deep-rooted mistrust of the Congress. Against those who feared that associating *saṃnyāsa* with politics might well degrade it, Gandhi maintained that such a move would uplift politics through 'Dharmic feelings'. For Gandhi, men like Shraddhananda were required because they could irrigate the political field with the high value of detachment. Gandhi's written encouragement was all the more remarkable since by that time Shraddhananda had drifted (p.218) away from him, officially because he had called off the movement of civil disobedience, but it seems also that the personal relations of the two men had become increasingly strained.

And so it happened that on 26 December 1919, Shraddhananda stood on the platform of the Indian National Congress in his emblematic ochre-coloured dress to welcome the hundreds of delegates. It was there for all to see that he was no more a householder, that he had definitely relinquished the ways of the world. But this had to be made audible as well and so he devoted the first part of his long speech to reflect aloud on the unexpected sight he was offering. For Shraddhananda shared with Gandhi the art of staging his public appearance:

It may be the first time in the history of this national [*jāṭīya*] assembly, that a *saṃnyāsī* is seen standing on its imposing platform [*vedī*]. Since the day I was selected to be the president of the Reception Committee, there has been this question: 'should a *saṃnyāsī* take part in a political movement?' My reply is very straightforward. The day I entered the holy stage of *saṃnyāsa* [*saṃnyasāśrama*], I took the vow [*vrata*] to regard the whole world with the same gaze, and, having abandoned my worldly sense of shame [*loka-lajjā*], to devote myself to the service of the world [*loka-sevā*].

It is not for the political movement, but for another task that I am standing on this platform today. (Bhāratīya 1987d, 155–6)

He went on to explain that through his presence he hoped to draw attention to the fate of the political prisoners of the Punjab, who had been arrested in the aftermath of the tragedy of Jallianwala Bagh in April 1919.¹³ But, he added, there was another reason for his participation in this annual session of the Congress:

The second reason has to do with my stage of life [*āśrama*] and the duty [*kartavya*] it entails. All the *sampradāyas*—the Sanātana Dharma Samāja, the Ārya Samāja and the other assemblies [*sabhā*] and associations [*samāja*]—which have been founded in India [*Bhāratavarṣa*], may wonder, what does a *saṃnyāsī* have to do [*kyā sambandha*] with politics? I reply: the Veda orders me to work as if I hoped to live for a hundred years, but on one condition, namely that I do not get caught in these acts. The poet Tulasīdāsa said rightly: ‘*karmapradhāna viśva kari rākhā*’ [that is, **(p.219)** the world is based on the laws of Karma], everyone has to fulfil one’s own *dharma*. Till today this ‘National Assembly of Bhārata’ has been doing ordinary political work, but today it will have to ascend to the pinnacle [*śikhara*] of *dharma* and along with it, O Sisters and Brothers!, we all shall have to lift our way of thinking. The penance [*tapa*] performed by the people of the Punjab teaches us through thousands of mouths that to obtain fundamental human rights [*mānavī mūla adhikāroṃ*], very hard penances are indispensable. The age of ethics [*nītiyoṃ*], of agreements [*rājīnāmōṃ*] and trade [*saudā-sulupha*] is now past; now the time has come to be firm in truth without fear. What has a *saṃnyāsī* to do with any *sampradāya*, be it religious [*dhārmika*] or political [*rājanaitika*]? He has to take up the challenging task of performing the *sevā* of the whole world [*saṃsāra*]. What has he got to do with any *sampradāya*?

In the past, too, the Aryasamaji Shraddhananda had wanted it to be known that he was not speaking in the name of his organization or of any established authority, be it religious or secular. But here he was making another claim, a claim to a moral authority derived from his own spiritual depth. It was self-proclaimed, just as his *saṃnyāsa* had been self-administered.

Shraddhananda’s innovative representation of the role of the *saṃnyāsī* is reflected in his unusual entry into that role in 1917.¹⁴ Unlike his master, Dayananda, who had been ordained by a *saṃnyāsī* of the Dasanāmī *sampradāya* and became a renouncer of this sectarian order, Shraddhananda was self-ordained. He had chosen a recognized, albeit rare, form of *saṃnyāsa* that made him free from all connections, including monastic ones. His making this very point in his 1919 speech should not be missed: he had ‘entered the fourth *āśrama*’, not a religious order (*sampradāya*).¹⁵ With this **(p.220)** understanding

of *saṁnyāsa*, he was indeed justified in declaring that he had no tie with any kind of organization whatsoever. Such a choice was in keeping with the Arya Samaj's claim to follow the authentic 'Vedic' institutions, unadulterated by sectarian developments, and with the organization's calling into question the legitimacy of all the established religious authorities of the times.

Reflecting aloud for the benefit of the Congress delegates on his entry into the fourth *āśrama*, Shraddhananda emphasized two characteristics: autonomy and disinterested action. Now in the traditional (Brahmanical) *āśrama* system, the member of the fourth *āśrama* is indeed autonomous. He goes wherever he wants and decides alone his course of action. This distinguishes him from the householder, whose socio-religious duties (*svadharma*) are not open to choice, but determined by his social stand (*varṇa*). At first sight, therefore, the idea that the renouncer acts in the world as one who is his own master seems to agree with the Brahmanical conception of the *saṁnyāsa-āśrama*. It does not, however, if one probes further. In the traditional understanding the renouncer is an autonomous individual only in the sense that he abandons collective religious activities in order to pursue an individual goal—spiritual liberation—through an individual religious conduct. With Shraddhananda's renouncer, on the other hand, we have an individual who, because he possesses a certain degree of independence, becomes a responsible being, endowed with individual consciousness. This understanding of autonomy resembles the type of individualism that was taking root among the urban elite of the times. Among the conditions that allowed a Shraddhananda to emerge into the sphere of politics were the transformations of the rules of the political game in colonial India: a space was created where individuals could exist as political actors.

Beside autonomy, disinterested action was the other principle that Shraddhananda stressed in his Congress speech. As a renouncer, the task he specifically set aside for himself was activity dedicated to the general welfare: the *saṁnyāsī*, he stated, 'has to take up the challenging task of doing *sevā* for the whole world [*saṁsāra*]', he has 'to devote [himself] to do service to the world [*loka-sevā*]' . Shraddhananda's renouncer, then, acts in the name of an ideal that is far above his narrow personal interests; he does 'not get caught in' his acts. This combination of disinterestedness and action cannot fail to evoke **(p.221)** the ethical message of the Bhagavad-Gītā, a text that was indeed a major inspiration for Shraddhananda, as we are going to see. Besides, Shraddhananda knew that among the Congress delegates he was addressing was the man who had recently published *Gītārahasya* ('the secret of the *Gītā*'), a powerful commentary of the *Gītā*: Lokmanya Tilak (1856–1920).

A number of reasons explain why the *Gītā*'s theory of ethical action became an instrument for political agitation during the first decade of the twentieth century. Political interest in the *Gītā* increased particularly in the aftermath of the partition of Bengal (1905), when it was used to promote the Swadeshi

movement (aimed at boycotting British goods) and became the beacon text for a whole generation of nationalists.¹⁶ Its use as a tool to mobilize the Hindus against the colonial power was so widespread that the colonial police intelligence classified it as seditious literature and started targeting those who referred to its teachings in public, be they poets, journalists, reformers, or ascetics—often dubbed ‘political sadhus’ (Ganachari 2005, 101).¹⁷ Thus, from 1908 onwards, the British maintained records on the monks of the Ramakrishna Mission (Ganachari 2005, 102). They also kept an eye on the activities of the Aryasamajis, a group they deeply mistrusted as we have seen. The publication of Tilak’s *Gītārahasya* in June 1915 was all they needed to be convinced that the scripture was potentially seditious. In fact Tilak had used the *Gītā* to legitimize political activism in Hindu terms and inflame Hindu audience right from the end of the 1890s (Ganachari 2005, 98; Karmakar 1956, 107–8). But by 1915, he was considered a declared enemy of the colonial regime. At the time it had been but one year that he had returned from Burma where he had been deported in 1908 on the charge of sedition. Soon translated into Hindi (1917) and several other vernacular languages, his long commentary on the *Gītā* (originally written in Marathi) would become **(p.222)** ‘the major philosophical work of the Indian Nationalist movement’ (Brown 1958, 198).

In order to understand how Tilak read the *Gītā*, it should be kept in mind that he had received his religious training in a milieu where Shankara’s interpretation had been strong but that later he had rejected it, claiming that the Advaitin philosopher had written his commentary at the expense of the text itself.¹⁸ Unlike Shankara, Tilak did not think that ‘the sooner the world was given up the better’ (Tilak 1935, xxiv). He wanted to replace this conception with the ideal of the *karma-yogin*, the man who dedicates his whole life to the general welfare by acting in the world. Given Tilak’s emphasis on worldly activity, his equal emphasis on renunciation (albeit redirected towards worldly activity) is all the more noteworthy:

The crucial point in the present state is whether after having acquired Knowledge, a man should take part in all activities of the world as part of his duties and for public welfare, or should entirely give them up, looking upon them as illusory. He who takes part in these activities is the Karma-yogin, whether he is married or not married, and whether he wears white clothes or saffron-coloured clothes. *Nay, for performing these activities, it is sometimes more convenient to remain unmarried or to wear saffron-coloured robes, or to go and live outside the town; because, by doing so, there is no obstruction in the way of applying one’s whole time and energy to public welfare, as it does not entail the worry of maintaining a family. Though such persons may be ascetics according to the dress which they wear, yet, essentially they are Karma-Yogins; but on the other hand, those persons, who look upon all worldly activities as useless, and abandon them and sit quiet, may be said to be ascetics, whether they have entered the*

fourth state of life or not. In short, the *Gītā* does not attach importance to white clothing or saffron-coloured clothing or to marriage and celibacy, but considers only whether the scient [*sic*, (p.223) translator's word] takes or does not take part in worldly activities, differentiating between Renunciation and Energism [translator's choice for 'karma-yoga']. (Tilak 1935, 421; my italics)

Now, in December 1919, Shraddhananda would not have been unacquainted with the *karma-yogī* of Tilak and with his total dedication to general welfare irrespective of his social status (that is to say, irrespective of his stage of life, or *āśrama*). Moreover, he was keenly aware of the presence of Tilak among his listeners. On two occasions, he quoted him in his speech. Tilak (whose last appearance on the national platform this was to be) had just returned from London then. On his way to Amritsar, he had read the Royal Proclamation that amnestied the thousands of prisoners sentenced under martial law in Punjab, and had immediately sent a telegram to King George V to express his gratitude and to assure him of 'responsive cooperation'. The old radical's reaction came like a bolt from the blue for the extremists (*garam-dala*) among the Congress delegates: was he the same man who but three years before (in December 1916) at the Lucknow session of the Congress had declared 'Home rule is my birth right and I will have it!?' (Brown 1974, 188). But Shraddhananda was not disappointed in Tilak's attitude. It agreed with his own conviction that for the nation the need of the hour was to speak with one voice. Hence, his two pointed references to Tilak's position in his welcome address served to underpin his own plea that both moderates (*naram-dal*) and extremists Congressists overcome their divisions and accept in unison the proposed Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, even if these did not fully satisfy the political demands of the Extremists.¹⁹

(p.224) Shraddhananda doubtlessly had the *Gītā* in mind in speaking of disinterested action with Tilak in the audience because the scripture was a major source of inspiration for him too. By 1919, he had written several essays on it.²⁰ This recourse to the *Gītā* was another notable point of difference from his master, Dayananda, who had not accorded the text any special importance though he recognized its authority (Llewellyn 1993, 167). However, Shraddhananda's understanding of the *Gītā*'s message differed from Tilak's. But then it also differed from the *Gītā* itself (often his commentaries are only loosely connected with it). Let it be recalled that in the *Gītā* renunciation remains, as in the Upaniṣads, the supreme path to liberation—the supreme goal—but not without a deep shift in meaning: now true renunciation does not mean giving up all types of action, it consists 'in abandoning the desire for results of one's action, while continuing to engage in activity' (Olivelle 1978, 33).²¹ Though the *Gītā* does not mention the *āśrama* system, most Hindu commentators understand it as an attempt at reconciling the householder's moral and social obligations with the renouncer's spirit of renunciation. By teaching that both the ethical obligations of life in the world (activity) and of life outside the world

(detachment) can be fulfilled conjointly, the Gītā means the internalization of the value of renunciation by the householder. But Shraddhananda's reading was different. He associated disinterested action with the condition of the fourth āśrama. What he meant was the internalization of the value of action by the renouncer. The result was an oxymoron: a renouncer who resembled the disinterested householder not because he was detached—a *saṁnyāsī* was detached **(p.225)** by definition—but because he acted in the world. His ideal renouncer was a hybrid, who reconciled the other wordly value of withdrawal with the worldly value of action.

And, unlike Tilak, Shraddhananda did not see in the Gītā an instrument for political agitation or for arousing the political consciousness of the people. He was no political agitator. However, like Tilak, he saw no contradiction in associating renunciation with dedication to the nation—speaking of 'service' (*loka-sevā*) and of 'well-being' (*hita*) of the world, where Tilak advised acting for the 'integrity' of the world (*loka-samgraha*). Thus, on the basis of Gītā 18.2, Shraddhananda wrote: 'In India today, thousands of people go about in ochre-coloured clothes If they were authentic renouncers, if even only a quarter of them were apt [*adhikārī*] to be renouncers, would there be such lamentations in India?' (Bhāratīya 1987a, 32). And on the basis of Gītā 18.11–12, he argued: (i) since nobody can abstain from acting, the renouncer too has a duty (*kartavya*) to accomplish; (ii) his duty is not only to be useful to the society, but also to teach it the dharma so as to improve it morally: 'the supreme *dharma* of the *saṁnyāsī* is to impulse the *dharma* [*dharma kā āndolana karake*] without fear and partiality and to propagate it for the good (*hita*) of men living in the world [*sāṁsārika manuṣyoṃ*]' (Bhāratīya 1987a, 24).

It is noteworthy that the conceptual space to receive Shraddhananda's view of the renouncer dedicated to the nation had already been created in the Aryasamaji milieu. On the one hand, Shraddhananda inherited the severe critique that Dayananda had directed towards the 'parasitic' lifestyle and the 'egoism' of those who were preoccupied solely by their own salvation. Defiance of 'idle', 'useless' religious men was a topos of the reformist scene. More generally, there was some difficulty in defining what the correct way of life of ascetics should be. But one would like to know why such a negative perception had become so widespread among Aryasamajis. Had renouncers failed in their eyes to embody *saṁnyāsa* because they idealized that state? On the other hand, the value of renunciation retained an undeniable prestige in the Arya Samaj even as the Samaj questioned the authority of traditional renouncers.

Dayananda's life itself had been a clear manifestation of this ambivalence.²² In other **(p.226)** words, Shraddhananda's conception was made possible because the moral superiority of renunciation as a value went unquestioned even though there was a degree of defiance of the traditional renouncer. The two went side by side. But even if renunciation remained as a value this was not without a twist: now renunciation had to serve the liberation of all and not just the

liberation of one. For the Aryasamajis of Shraddhananda's generation, ordinary renouncers could not offer the potential of responsible leadership: their lifestyle created discomfort because it was perceived as socially irresponsible. What was required was a change of plane (from the individual to the collective), a change of motivation (from egoism to altruism), and a change of orientation (from other-worldly to this-worldly). A higher and larger ideal was needed, far above one's personal interests. And what ideal could be higher in those years than national struggle? Under the circumstances of the time, it was in the political struggle that a man like Shraddhananda could bring about his particular juxtaposition of renunciation and action.

Interestingly, a similar conception of renunciation was found with Lajpat Rai, a long-time opponent of Shraddhananda within the Arya Samaj, and one who had never shared his 'life-negating tendencies'.²³ Shraddhananda's speech at the 1919 session of the Indian National Congress would have sounded familiar to the delegates who had attended the 1905 session and heard these words of Lajpat Rai:

Is it not a matter of shame for us that this National Congress in the last twenty-one years should not have produced at least a number of political Sanyasis that could sacrifice their lives for the political regeneration **(p. 227)** of the country? Now that the Congress has come to a stage when it could become a father, a parent, I earnestly appeal to you to have its legitimate offsprings: a band of earnest missionaries to work out the political regeneration of the country.²⁴

A few months earlier, Lajpat Rai had also declared in public:

Where are the political Sanyasis whose sole work in life should be the preaching of the gospel of freedom, who should, even at the point of the bayonet, say with Galelio [*sic* for Galileo], 'there they are, I see them moving'.

And then he had invited the 'best sons' of Bengal to 'consecrate their lives' to the 'struggle for freedom' before concluding:

Let them seek no payment for their labours but what is sufficient for their sustenance. Let them build no houses, create no estates and live simple frugal lives. If possible let them be celibates.²⁵

Such evocations were clearly audible even outside the Arya Samaj. In 1905, Lajpat Rai's socially useful and committed renouncer would have immediately called to mind the example of Vivekananda (1863–1902), who had died but three years before, in 1902. Vivekananda had held that once adequately trained, renouncers could be efficacious agents of social progress. The fact that he regarded the path of renunciation in comparison to that of the householder as

being better adapted to social service—what he too called *sevā*—comes out in a letter written from America to his brother disciples at Alambazar monastery in the summer of 1894:

What is wanted is an organizational power—do you understand me? Have any of you got that much brain in your head? If you do, let your mind work. Brother Tarak, Sharat, and Hari will be able to do it.—[name deleted] has got very little originality, but is a very good workman and persevering—which is an essential necessity, and Shashi (Ramakrishnananda) is an executive to a degree.... We want some **(p.228)** disciples—fiery young men—do you see?—intelligent and brave, who dare to face the jaws of Death, and are ready to swim across the ocean. Do you follow me? We want hundreds like that, both men and women. Try your utmost for that end alone. Make converts right and left, and put them into our purity-drilling machine. ... We must electrify society, electrify the world. Idle gossip and barren ceremonials won't do. Ceremonials are meant for householders, your work is the distribution and propagation of thought-currents. If you can do that, then it is alright.

Let character be formed and then I shall be in your midst. Do you see? *We want two thousand Sannyasins, nay ten, or even twenty thousand*—men and women, both. What are our matrons doing? We want converts no matter what the risks are. Go and tell them, and try yourself, heart and soul. *Not householder disciples, mind you, we want Sannyasins. Let each one of you have a hundred heads tonsured—young educated men, not fools.* Then you are heroes. We must make a sensation. Give up your passive attitude, gird your loins, and stand up. Let me see you make some electric circuits between Calcutta and Madras. Start centres at places, go on always making converts. *Convert everyone into the monastic order whoever seeks for it, irrespective of sex,* and then I shall be in your midst. ... Those that care for their personal comforts and seek a lazy life, who are ready to sacrifice all before their personal whims, are none of us; let them pack off, while yet there is time.²⁶

At the turn of the twentieth century, the social commitment of renouncers inaugurated by Vivekananda created in the public sphere forms and practices of mobilization as yet unheard of. It has been shown that some of the roots of such social commitment can be found in the social activities of the Swaminarayan sect in Gujarat (Williams 1984, 92). But Vivekananda proposed a profound reappraisal of *sevā* when he stressed that a renouncer not only *could* but *ought* to organize relief operations in human or natural disasters. We need to recall that he came to advocate social service in the specific context of the terrifying famines of 1890 and 1892 (Beckerlegge 2000, chapter 4).²⁷ No **(p.229)** wonder Tilak would be acclaiming in Vivekananda an innovative type of renouncer:

He is a sanyasin but not an ascetic of the old time, to whom the world is nothing, but the sanyasin of the new type of the *Bhagwat Gita*, to whom the world is everything and his own country and people more dear than all the world put together.²⁸

All this shows then that when Shraddhananda made his rather dramatic entry on to the political stage, the renouncer with a strong proclivity towards patriotism was not a novelty. Such a renouncer answered Tilak's call for a form of a dedication that engaged the whole strength of the person and could not be conciliated with normal life. More unexpectedly perhaps he corresponded to the form of dedication to the national struggle that Lajpat Rai had called for in December 1905. It is worth recalling here that the Arya Samaj was divided at that time over the issue of political participation. In this respect as in several others, Lajpat Rai and Munshi Ram, the future Shraddhananda, stood at opposite ends. While the former had been seriously involved in Congress activities since the 1890s, Munshi Ram, as we have seen, was not convinced that political struggle was the urgent need of the hour; he betted on social reform through educational work. In view of the later development of his thoughts, it is therefore of some significance that in a speech delivered in 1908, the future Shraddhananda had compared the Arya Samaj to a renouncer precisely to advise his coreligionists *to keep away from politics*. At the time, some eminent Aryasamajis were planning to send a delegation to the British government to clear their name of being considered politically subversive, a potentially disastrous accusation for their social career. Opposing their project, the future Shraddhananda argued thus:

Individually, the members of the *Ārya samāja* may be householders [*grhastha*], but as an institution [*saṁsthā*], the *Ārya samāja* itself is a renouncer [*saṁnyāsī*]. The renouncer rises above prejudices [*pūrvāgraha*] of the different classes [*varga*] and castes [*jāti*], and he instructs in their respective duties [*kartavya*] those who govern [*śāsaka*] and those who are governed [*śāsita*]. If an individual [*vyakti*] or a collection of individuals [*vyaktisamūha*] do not respect their duties, then the *Ārya samāja* has the right [*adhikāra*] to call them to order [*bhartsanā karnā*]. It also has the right **(p.230)** to tell someone, who is not able to control his animal tendencies [*pāśvī pravṛttiyaṁ*], that he does not deserve political autonomy [*svarājya*].²⁹ ... Ārya brothers, since you are citizens of the British Empire, and as householders, you can lead a deputation as you please, but you do not have the right to organize an assembly of representatives in the name of the *Ārya samāja* because this organization is a powerful renouncer. The renouncer places his ultimate faith [*niṣṭhā*] in the Supreme Soul-Ordainer [*vidhātā paramātmā*], and it is at his feet that he submits his petition [*arjī*]. The right to serve humanity [*mānavatā kī sevā*] belongs to the divine Bestower [*daivapradatta*]. ... The renouncer can be compared to a cloud.

The higher the cloud climbs, the purer [*śuddha*] and holier [*pavitra*] it becomes, and the greater is his capacity to water the earth with its rain.

Let us pray to the Almighty [*sarvaśaktimāna*] that he may make you strong so that you may accomplish your duty as householders and be always intent on [*tatpar*] protecting the high ideals of the renouncer-institution of the *Ārya samāja* in such a way that the union [*samanvaya*] of the householder and the renouncer may be fruitful.³⁰

Note again the unshakeable presence of the categories of ‘householders’ and ‘renouncers’ taken by the Arya Samaj from the Brahmanical tradition. Also noticeable is the fact that the future Shraddhananda went past the idea that the renouncer is able to stand above the petty concerns of everyday life and asserted that he has to teach dharma. It shows that if he did think that the renouncer had to fulfil a role in society, it was not a political one. At this point of his life, his conception still echoed Dayananda’s own.

Eleven years later, things were quite different. In 1919, Shraddhananda was finally led to link renunciation, which he had always favoured, and politics, regarding which he had had until then the strongest reservation, because a man like Gandhi had arrived in his life. As he wrote to him:

When the call came from you, whom I regard to be the embodiment of our ancient spiritual culture, I responded to the call with my whole heart and soul. (Bhāratīya 1987b, 185)³¹

(p.231) A statement all the more revealing of the depth of his motivation since at the time of making it he had parted ways with Gandhi. Shraddhananda’s hybrid renouncer gives an insight into the nature of his political activity. It shows that even if he was not a man to accept compromise,³² he still excelled at reconciling opposites in his own life.

In this chapter, I have attempted to make sense of the penetration of the value of *saṃnyāsa*, or world renunciation—a very high if not the highest value in the Hindu scheme of things—into the secular world of Indian politics. I have argued that when Indian nationalism was entering into the decisive phase that led to independence, a great potential for political action was attributed to renunciation. But to what sort of renunciation? As a practice, *saṃnyāsa* corresponds to a social concept that never had a fixed form, neither in terms of institutions (the concept has been reformulated by each sect that has adopted it) nor in terms of conduct. Throughout Indian history, it has been associated with unworldly as well as with worldly life patterns, with all sorts of conducts, including violent ones. Side by side with renouncers fully engaged in the pursuit of the ultimate goal of liberation (*mokṣa*), there have been others involved in teaching, trade, wars, and politics. This multifaceted phenomenon could also be observed during the period I have considered here. And it can be observed even

today. In other words, *as a practice*, world renunciation is not a unitary phenomenon in Hinduism. *As a value*, however, renunciation has always been associated with detachment and other-worldliness. My argument has been that during the rise of nationalism, this value was made the highest moral ideal of political struggle by some—for again, it is not to deny that side by side there existed other conceptions of political action, including other religiously inspired ones. Two conditions seem to have been required for this development. On the one hand, the resilience of **(p.232)** renunciation as supreme value at the very time when many were dissatisfied with the renouncers, whom one encountered in actual life; on the other hand, the reformulation of detachment and other-worldliness as *disinterestedness*. Shraddhananda's speech of 1919 embodied this understanding, but what is noteworthy is that this way of thinking was not entirely personal. The transfer of the value of renunciation from the religious sphere to the secular world of politics belonged to a stock of shared expectations of what the nationalist struggle ought to be.³³

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Notes:

⁽¹⁾ I am particularly grateful to Martin Fuchs and Vasudha Dalmia for their help in revising this chapter.

⁽²⁾ See, for example, the works of the contemporary French philosopher André Comte-Sponville (1995; 2006).

⁽³⁾ Some of the data used in this chapter appear in a preliminary form in a comparative study of Swami Shraddhananda's and Swami Dayananda's public careers published in French (Clémentin-Ojha 2011).

⁽⁴⁾ My other sources for the reconstruction of the historical context are Shraddhanand (1946, a collection of articles written in English by Swami Shraddhananda in 1926 to explain his ambivalent relationship with the Indian National Congress); and Mittra (1921, a detailed account of the Rowlatt satyagraha and of the subsequent events up to the findings of the Hunter Commission on the Punjab violence of April 1919).

⁽⁵⁾ Mittra (1921, 51–3 and 54–6)—the latter being Swami Shraddhananda's own account of what happened; see also Shraddhanand (1946, 56–60).

(⁶) The translation from the original Hindi. This and the following translations from this speech are mine.

(⁷) Regarding his earlier attitudes towards politics, see also Jordens (1981, 80–93). Though he had attended several Congress sessions, he had used their huge gatherings only to propagate his ethical and religious ideals.

(⁸) Lajpat Rai was deported to Burma for sedition (without trial) between May and November 1907, provoking nationwide protests. Chirol (1910, chapter 8) gives a revealing account of British suspicion towards the Arya Samaj. Rai (1915, chapter 4) denies Chirol's allegations; however, upon his return from his deportation to Burma, he offered to sever his connections with the Arya Samaj in case his political activities represented a threat to the movement, see Anonymous (c. 1910, 105).

(⁹) Chirol (1910, 114–15); Rai (1915, 207–10); and Anonymous (c. 1910, 113).

(¹⁰) Since it claims direct continuity with 'Vedic culture', the Arya Samaj considers the Brahmanical āśrama system or the division of life in four stages, each characterized by specific rules of religious conduct, an ideal arrangement. During the first stage, young males are educated in the family (*kula*) of their guru; hence, the name *gurukula*, which Swami Shraddhananda gave to his institution. It is also the āśrama system that he had at the back of his mind when he declared that he had renounced the world by 'entering into the fourth āśrama' [of *saṃnyāsa*] (see *infra* and fn. 15). On the Gurukul of Kangri, its objectives and rules, see Jordens (1981, 55–8, 66–102) and Fischer-Tiné (2001). On the observance of chastity (*brahmacarya*) at the Gurukul of Kangri, see Watt 1997 (368–9).

(¹¹) Thus, Swami Shraddhananda would declare at Amritsar: '...The most important task is to control our conduct [*caritra-saṅgaṭhana*], so that we may take the nation in our hands' (Bhāratīya 1987d, 163).

(¹²) *Dharma yudha* for *dharma yuddha*, that is, just war. For him 'the movement was more Dharmic than political' (Shraddhanand 1946, 51). Thus, he advised the satyagrahis to 'meditate for half an hour and pray to Paramatma that he may turn the hearts' of the British (Shraddhanand 1946, 54).

(¹³) Just before the Congress session started, King George V issued a Royal Proclamation announcing the amnesty of all the political prisoners.

(¹⁴) I thank G. Beckerlegge for this suggestion (personal communication, August 2010).

(¹⁵) In the Brahmanical tradition, the fourth āśrama (*saṃnyāsa*) is the last stage of life that the twice-born male (*dvija*) adopts (once he has become a grandfather) in order to pursue spiritual liberation (*mokṣa*). What he then

rejects first and foremost are the ritual activities of the householder and the entanglements of domestic life. See also fn. 10. Some Hindu monastic orders (sampradāya) claim continuity with the fourth āśrama: since they have retained the term 'saṃnyāsa', the changes to the practice of saṃnyāsa tend to remain concealed.

(¹⁶) Ganachari (2005, 98); see also Brown (1958) and Harvey (1986).

(¹⁷) On the objectionable teachings of the *Gītā*, see also the police report on Krishnaji Prabhakar Khadilkar (who was the editor of *Kesari* while Tilak was in jail) in Anonymous (c. 1910, 41).

(¹⁸) The following quotation sums up his judgement:

It is true that the followers of Śaṃkarācārya hold that after the acquisition of Knowledge, one must renounce the world and give up Action; but on that account it does not follow, that the same is the teaching of the *Gītā*, or that one has to interpret the *Gītā* in a manner consistent with the doctrines laid down by Śaṃkarācārya or some other doctrinaire, after first taking it for granted that the doctrine expounded by Śaṃkarācārya or such other doctrinaire is the only true doctrine. (Tilak 1935, 428–9)

(¹⁹) Having stated with approval that not only the group of the moderates (*naram-dala*), but also Tilak himself, the leader of the extremists (*garam-dala*), was ready to accept the reform scheme of Montagu, Shraddhananda declared: 'Now Tilak Maharaj also says the very same. We should accept as much as we have obtained and for the rest let us continue the movement. Therefore why be divided? From both sides [of the Congress] the same reply has been obtained' (Bhāratīya 1987d, 157–8). Returning to the subject a while later, he observed: 'The fighting is over because Lokamanya Tilak Maharaj has delivered the *vyavasthā* that whatever has been obtained should be taken and for the rest one should continue the organized movement [*vyavasthita āndolan*]. ... Won't the soldiers [*sainika*] of the army of volunteers for the mother [*māṭṛ-sevaka-senā*] bow their head to the *vyavasthā* of their old general [*senāpati*]' (Bhāratīya 1987d, 159). Note the term '*vyavasthā*' (opinion) taken from the religious law vocabulary: a suggestive (and slightly ironical as well?) way to describe Tilak's incontestable authority.

(²⁰) These essays, which were published in Jalandhar from 1889 onwards in Shraddhananda's Urdu (and subsequently Hindi) weekly, *Saddharmapracāraka* ('the propagation of the true *dharma*'), bear on 14 verses of the Bhagavad *Gītā* (XVI, 23; XVII, 14, 15, 17; XVIII, 2, 6, 9, 10–12, 45–7, 49); they were republished jointly in Bhāratīya (1987a).

(²¹) Therefore, even someone active in the world can obtain liberation: he does not have to give up action but just to accomplish his duties (dharma) in a detached manner and to dedicate all his acts to God.

(²²) Dayananda had not renounced the world to keep aloof from it. Following the example of his guru, Virajananda Sarasvati (1779–1868), he became a teacher, and he also kept trying, quite in vain though, to influence the religious policy of prominent Hindu rulers (Jordens 1978); regarding the relationship between Dayananda and the court of Jaipur, see Clémentin-Ojha (1999, 197–206); regarding Virajananda's association with the same court, see Clémentin-Ojha (2004).

(²³) While writing about the importance of imparting education on 'national lines', Lajpat Rai criticized renunciation's 'life negating tendencies', adding: 'the aim of education is to fit men and women for the battle of life. We do not want to convert them into anchorites and ascetics' (*The Modern Review*, March and April 1919, quoted by Joshi 1966, 366). With this he clearly referred to the Gurukul of Kangri.

(²⁴) Published in the report of the 21st session of the Indian National Congress, reproduced in Joshi (1966, 101).

(²⁵) 'Our struggle for freedom: how to carry it on', *Hindusthan Review and Kayastha Samachar*, vol. 12, 1905, 349–56, reproduced in Joshi (1966, 84). For a similar reference to Galileo, see a discourse of Surendranath Banerjea in 1895 (Hay 1991, 102).

(²⁶) Vivekananda (1894); this is the published English translation of the original Bengali, italics mine. In a post-scriptum, Vivekananda added: 'The term organisation means division of labour. Each does his own part, and all the parts taken together express an ideal of harmony.'

(²⁷) The gist of the argument is that Vivekananda's conception of philanthropic work was not modelled on Christian missionary activity (comp. Fort 1997); on the contested historical roots of sevā, see also Beckerlegge (2015).

(²⁸) 'Swami Vivekananda', *Mahratta*, 7 May 1899, quoted by Ganachari (2005, 106).

(²⁹) Gandhi could have said this. Let it be recalled that this statement was uttered in 1908.

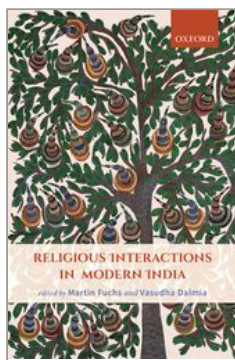
(³⁰) Speech delivered in Lahore in 1908 at the 31st annual celebration of the Arya Samaj (Bhāratīya 1987c, 142–3).

(³¹) Shraddhananda was writing (in English) to Gandhi to protest against his decision to suspend the satyagraha movement two months after its beginning; he also asked him to withdraw his name from the organizing committee (Bhāratīya 1987b, 185).

(³²) ‘...The Swami could not play the game of compromise. Time and again his stubborn radicalism led him into disagreements with whatever organization he became involved in ...’ (Jordens 1981, 169).

(³³) Shraddhananda’s reply to the demand of the time to resolve the tension between the contradictory imperatives of politics and religion was not unambiguous. In 1924, he published *Sangathan, The Saviour of the Hindu Race*, a book that articulated his fear of the eminent demographic collapse of the Panjabi Hindu minority, his plea that Hindus organize (*saṅgaṭhana*) themselves and, through purification (*śuddhi*), reclaim Hindus converted to other faiths and uplift Untouchables. In December 1926, at the height of yet another of his aggressive conversion campaigns, he was assassinated by an outraged Muslim.

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The Logics of Multiple Belonging

Gandhi, His Precursors, and Contemporaries

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Abstract and Keywords

The chapter discusses Gandhi moving from a synthetic Hinduism in the 1910s/20s to a discourse of multiple belonging in the 1940s, however permeated by tensions. The chapter takes Gandhi as standing in a line with earlier thinkers such as Ibn al-'Arabi and Bulhe Shah. Gandhi attempted to formulate a set of ethical and metaphysical universals that were common to all religions. In Gandhi's view, none had the right to condemn or reform the elements of any religion but his/her own. The author sees Gandhi attempting to devise a non-sectarian Hinduism that was inclusive of all that was exemplary in other religions. In the 1940s, Gandhi's earlier intuition of simultaneously belonging to all religions grew into greater prominence and he denied the view that religions were the exclusive property of those born into them. However, when Gandhi tried claiming a special universalizeability for Hinduism, he too fell victim to the idea of Hindu exceptionalism.

Keywords: Hinduism, Gandhi, multiple belonging, Ibn al-'Arabi, Bulhe Shah, non-sectarian Hinduism, Hindu exceptionalism

Ibn al-'Arabi (c. 1165–1240), born to an elite Arab family in court service in Murcia, al-Andalus, grew up in urban Seville (Spain), travelled transregionally in north Africa, west Asia, and the eastern Mediterranean before settling in Damascus; he was conversant with the Koran, Andalusian, Persian and eastern Sufis, Neoplatonic, and perhaps Jewish Kabbalistic and Christian Gnostic traditions; and two of his spiritual teachers were women.¹ In his powerful and

controversial idea of the unity of being or existence, *wahdat al-wujud*, no entities other than god exist, and god is not only transcendent but also the absolute being who manifests himself in every form of existence.

My heart became capable of every form:/It is a pasture for gazelles, a cloister for Christian monks,/A temple for idols, the Kaaba of the pilgrim,/ The tablets of the Torah and the book of the Quran./ I follow the **(p.237)** religion of Love; whichever way its [Love's] camels take,/ for this is my religion and my faith.²

The heart, possessed by the 'Divine', becomes a receptacle: a pasture for spiritual nourishment, a convent, a temple, the most sacred Islamic pilgrimage site in Mecca, and the ground on which more than one religious text is inscribed. The changefulness of the heart seems to embody the variety of divine manifestations.

Bulhe Shah (floruit c. 1680–1758) was born in Qasur, Panjab; the first three decades of his life coincided with the reign of Aurangzeb and Sikh militancy. He was a disciple of Shah Inayat Qadri of Lahore, who was affiliated to the Qadri and Shattari Sufi orders and born into the Arain caste of vegetable gardeners. Bulhe Shah works directly with the motif of a shape-shifting god who can take Vaishnav and Muslim guises:

Bindraban vicch gaoon charaae/Lanka charh ke naad vajaae
Makke daa Haaji ban aae/ Vaahvaa rang vataai daa/
Hun kisto aap chhapaai daa.

(You graze the cows in Vrindavan and sound the horn in Lanka. You become the Haji of Mecca, you change your colour and form wonderfully. From whom do you conceal yourself now?). (Kohli 1987, 59)

This god is *in* his worshippers too, the seeker and the sought, immanent and transcendent, visible and veiled.

Kahu turak musalle parhte ho/Kahu bhagat hindu jap karte ho/Kahu
ghor ghunghat mein parte ho/ Kahu ghat ghat laadaladai hai. ...

(Somewhere you are a Turk reciting prayers on a mat; somewhere you are a devoted bhagat absorbed in Hindu meditation; somewhere you hide yourself in a thick veil and somewhere you indulge in love in every home...) (Kohli 1987, 64–5).

(p.238) Eh parda kis to rakhida./ Kite rumi ho kite saami ho/ kite
sahib kite gulaami ho/ tusi aape aap tamaami ho.

(From whom do you hide and stay behind this curtain?/ Here you are a Turk and there a Syrian,/ Here a master and there a slave./You are Yourself all that exists, the Many and the One.)³

M.K. Gandhi had interacted with multiple sects and religions as a student in England; he had been a Gujarati migrant, a minoritized colonial subject in South Africa, and a transnational traveller in ships with multilingual passengers before he entered the national movement in India. Attempting to formulate a set of ethical and metaphysical universals that were common to all religions—as objective or observable resemblances, as their distilled essence, and as the ground of their compatibility—he wrote speculatively in a somewhat conditional and reformist vein in 1926:

If I could call myself, say, a Christian, or a Mussulman, *with my own interpretation* of the Bible or the Quran, I should not hesitate to call myself either. For then Hindu, Christian and Mussulman would be *synonymous* terms.⁴

Faced with an increasing acceptance of the two-nation theory in the 1940s and the communal violence preceding Partition, he said emphatically and assertively in 1946:

I am a Muslim, a Hindu, a Buddhist, a Christian, a Jew, a Parsi.⁵
I think I am as much a Christian, a Sikh and Jain as I am a Hindu.⁶

Here the person and public persona of Gandhi become the coalescing site of several religions.

What are the connecting arcs, the proximities and the distances, between these three figures? Ibn al-‘Arabi and Bulhe Shah have not been juxtaposed with Gandhi even though the question of the One and the many was crucial to Sufi metaphysics, central to Gandhi’s non-sectarian project, carried a peculiar intensity whenever the **(p.239)** cohabitation of religions was shaken by spectres of violence, and played into varied ideas of national belonging in the twentieth century. I will argue that pantheisms, panentheisms, and non-dualisms generated complex constellations that need to be disentangled since they could be mobilized as a discourse of the One and the many in differing ways—either to make the diversity of beliefs in a multi-religious formation *legible*, or to evoke tolerance of many coexisting faiths, to understand, affirm, or expand extant practices of the worship of many gods, or, contrarily, be put to sectarian use, made to underline hierarchies and support majoritarian claims. The long shadow of Ibn al-‘Arabi and Bulhe Shah that falls on Gandhi poses questions about Hindu exceptionalism, its exclusions, disavowals, and misrepresentations. For instance, what were the congruences or divergences within and between pantheist or panentheist currents which could be anchored in Sufi mysticism and Islamic theology or anchored in the Advaita and Hindu sects? What is the significance of the slippages or passages between pantheisms (which identify god with the universe in a relationship of equivalence) and panentheisms (which regard the

non-divine universe as a manifestation of god but not as ontologically equivalent) within a multi-religious formation?

The heterodox and eclectic patterns of belief that could make spaces for individual combinatoires and unfolded in recurring struggles with hostile orthodoxies are not only a significant part of South Asian history but still speak to pressing concerns. As I will show, Gandhi's path was narrowed by his implication in colonial and contemporary nationalist definitions of an ingestive Hinduism as well as widened by older lineages and extant multi-religious pluralisms. His complex relation with these lineages and precursors became more apparent as he distanced Hindu exceptionalism, and this, along with the religious-ethical solutions proposed by his thought and practice in the 1940s, inaugurated a new semantic of the individual worshipper and multiple belonging, a semantic that not only made a powerful intervention in his own time but also could address the communalization of contemporary India.

The deep and wide circulation of al-'Arabi's ideas, especially the unity of being, is well known; they spread across western, south, and **(p.240)** southeast Asia, parts of Africa and southern Europe, and comprise a still-living history of refutation, reservation, reconciliation, mediation, and acceptance (see Chodkiewicz 1993, 2–18; Ricci 2011). They travelled to India and are seen to provide a bridge between west Asian and Indic Sufism, Hinduism, and Islam (Nizami 1985, 122–4, 232–3, 266, 269; Rizvi 1978, 1, 104–5). Orthodox Sufis such as Ala al-Daula Simnani opposed al-'Arabi from the fourteenth century, but his ideas were propagated between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries by *wujudi* Sufis such as the Chishtis, the Shattaris, Sharaf al-Din Yahya Maneri, and Shaikh Muhammad Ghaus (Roy 1983, 152–3).⁷ The doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud* could be perceived as an enabler of social unity that allowed Muslims and Hindus to recognize their different gods and practices as part of a greater cosmic unity; from the seventeenth century, it also allowed interpretations of non-Muslim religious ideas as part of god's limitless manifestation. If god was everywhere, then he could be found in the temple idol and in the mosque. The fact that it encouraged some Muslims to minimize the difference between Islam and other religions and/or the ontological separation between god and his creatures was attacked by Ahmad Sirhindi, the Naqshbandi Sufis, and other anti-syncretic Islamic currents (Green 2012, 79, 145, 164).⁸ Even so, the *wujudi* ideas carried in institutionalized Sufi orders, practices, idioms, texts, and orality spilled into wider rural and urban sites of multilingual diffusion and **(p.241)** diversification through vernacularization as well as prose narrative, poetry, and music. Further, the discourse of the One and many among *wujudi* Sufis and north Indian sants—*ek anek*—negotiated both the formless single god and his substantive manifestations, and became a site of monist, monotheist and pantheist intersections as well as overlaps between *nirguna* (formless) and *saguna* (embodied) conceptions of god.

There are no eighteenth-century manuscripts of Bulhe Shah; *qawwals*, singers of Sufi devotional music, and other singers are the source of later compilations of his ecstatic poetry (Matringe 1992, 199). His *kafis*, verses, were first printed in the late nineteenth century and by then many voices had mingled under his name. His compositions thus were an open text, still being signed into by followers, filtered through wujudi Sufi, Sikh, nirguna sant, or Vaishnav bhakti idioms as well as the shared or composite beliefs and practices of sant/shrine veneration in Panjab.⁹ Their musical renditions were concurrent with Gandhi as well as with British colonial rule.

The wilful and playful god that recurs in Bulhe Shah's retrospectively inscribed oeuvre falls into the ambit of Ibn al-'Arabi's locutions of the fixity of one god with many names and the many paths to a single god. For al-'Arabi, god, the 'absolute' weaves transcendence and immanence, a synthesis that requires perceiving 'the One in the Many and Many in the One, or rather to see the Many as One and One as Many'.¹⁰ His powerful formulation of the diverse paths to **(p. 242)** god and the complementary diversity of the self-disclosure of god to each religious group, also proposed the infinite diversity and uniqueness both of believers and god's self-disclosures(s): although god as non-manifest is fixed, undisclosed and immutable, there are plural manifestations of god, and 'beliefs present Him in various guises ... they give Him form and they fabricate Him'.¹¹ The infinite plurality of gods is a personal fabrication but *not* a falsehood and does not subtract from the oneness of 'Real God'. For al-'Arabi, the two can be reconciled in the generous variety of god's self disclosures and the ever-present possibility of experiencing the 'Real':

The doctrines are diverse because of the diversity of the views of those who view Him. Every viewer worships and believes only what he himself has brought into existence in his own heart. He brings into existence in his heart nothing but a created thing. That is not the Real God. Yet in that doctrinal form He discloses Himself to him.¹²

Like al-'Arabi, the manifest shapes of god and the individuation of believers in Bulhe Shah's imagery are linked, address a religious plurality, the conflictual presence of defined sects, the superficiality of such definition, and indicate the stable substance but elusive presence of a single non-manifest god taking 'other' manifest guises. However, **(p.243)** the images also open into or acquire some regional interpretative possibilities with distinct nuances. A mercurial god who adopts the guises fabricated by devotees could also speak to the surplus of divinities, the sometimes mutual attraction or adjacency between discrete conceptions of divinity, the webbed terrain and re-interpretative freedoms composed by shared or adopted beliefs or changes of affiliation—movement from sect to sect, to and fro, partial or incomplete conversions—and relocate conversion in any direction as merely a secondary shift to another manifestation of the same unitive god. It stops short at the brink of a radical relativization—a

god with no primary guise, that is, who has only guises and so cannot be 'disguised'. In fact it is the undifferentiated oneness of god that permits the dual or multiple manifestations of god, and hence the multiplicity of sects and gods, yet these do not challenge the essence of the unitary god. Conversion, especially partial conversion along with variations in practice, seen from this standpoint, does not threaten the integrity of any normative religion. Rather, it merely signals differing apprehensions of a single god who cannot, properly speaking, ever be contained in any one set of beliefs. In other words, this may be a third place in the interstices between sharply defined religions that is tacitly amenable to both monotheism and partial conversion, and in which more than one manifest form can be absorbed by a believer.

Finally, as a performative concept, Bulhe Shah's shape-shifting god can flow into or complement different agential and inverse subject positions including femaleness. Staking the body, he is said to have learned music and dance from a courtesan to regain the grace of his preceptor (*murshid*), Shah Inayat. He sang in the self-lowering, coaxing voice of a courtesan.¹³ The ecstatic re-gendering of his body in dance is part of the learned labour and grammar of self-abasement but also partakes of the excess embodied in the female devotional voice which unsettles heteronormativity.

If assertions of faith can also be acts of relationship and connection, Bulhe Shah's claim of not belonging to any given religion is at once an act of denial and affirmation—an act that recognizes and relates him to more than one even as it affirms the immanence of god.

(p.244) Kee jaanaan mein kaun Bulya/ Na mein momin vicch maseetan/
Na mein vicch kufr diyan reetan/ Na mein paakan vicch paleetan/ Na mein
Musa na Firaun/. ... Na mein bhed mazhab da paaya/. ... Na mein aapna
naam dharaaya/ Na vicch baithaan na vicch kol/. ... Na mein Arabi na
Lahori/ Na mein Hindi shahar Nagori/ Na hindu na turak Peshauri/. ...
Awwal aakhir aap nu jaanaan/ Na koyo duja hor pucchaanan...

(Who knows what I am Bulya/ I am not an orthodox Muslim sitting in a mosque/ I am not given to the rites of idolatry, I do not have knowledge of the sacred scriptures./ I am neither among the pure nor the defiled/ I am neither Moses nor Pharoah/. ... I have not found the secret essence of religion/. ... I have neither found nor settled my name/ I am neither settled nor a traveller/.... I am neither Arab, nor from Lahore,/ I am not from the Indian town of Nagor,/ neither Hindu, nor Turk from Peshawar/ First and last, [I] only know I/ and refuse to recognize anyone else...)¹⁴

In this kafi, which has antecedents in a Persian composition by the Sufi mystic Jalaluddin Rumi (1207–73), neither place nor sect seem to constitute self-knowledge, scepticism combines with a self already surrendered to the god

within, and refusal is cast in a declarative linguistic act that presumes the consequential power to make a world in which social distinctions are inconsequential. His insistence that he is neither this nor that could signal the sixth station prior to *fana*—a self-dissolution, a breaking up of the typifications of ascription and consensual reality, but not of the absolute.

Ibn al-‘Arabi and Bulhe Shah, visionaries and mystics, are both distant from and proximate to Gandhi. The philosophy of al-‘Arabi inclines towards an expansion of belief that can assist gnosis:

Do not attach yourself to any particular creed exclusively, so that you disbelieve in all the rest; otherwise you will lose much good, nay, you will fail to recognize the real truth of the matter. Let your soul be capable of embracing all forms of belief. God, the omnipresent and omnipotent, is not limited by any one creed, for He says, ‘Wheresoever ye turn, there is the face of Allah’ (Koran ii, 109); and the face of a thing is its reality.¹⁵

(p.245) He acknowledges diverse beliefs *and* the gnosis that moves through and beyond them towards the unitary god; yet this movement neither belittles nor subsumes the diverse beliefs (see al-‘Arabi 1980, 152–3). For Bulhe (via al-‘Arabi and Rumi), the subtle registers of multiple belonging come from the shifting shapes of an enigmatic god that makes the diversity of religions legible, from the very immanence of an indwelling god which *implicates* and *connects* all his manifestations and thus all believers, as well as the plurality inherent in orature—Bulhe’s verse enfolds other voices and is not an entirely individual voice.

There is a difference, even a historical shift, between Bulhe’s rejectionism, and being neither this nor that in the search for gnosis, and Gandhi’s selective gathering which culminates in a centred claim to be everything. Gandhi’s discourse of multiple belonging rested firmly on an ‘I’-claim and an *ethical* universalism grounded in the nation-to-be, in the putative nation as the space for becoming, in non-sectarian reformism, in ‘civilizational’ unity, in his own charisma as a preceptor, and an individuation that could bypass sectarian strictures. His move from a synthetic Hinduism in the 1910s and 1920s to a discourse of multiple belonging, which becomes quite emphatic in the 1940s, is suffused with tensions between the notion of discrete major religions and the entitlement to interpret or believe in other religions; between a concept of ethical universality and religious particularism; between the notion of distinct religions and the diversity of individual believers; and between Advaitic monism and the varied lineages of bhakti, sant, Sufi devotion. Gandhi’s evident but unremarked adjacencies to al-‘Arabi and Bulhe Shah, to Sufi/Islamic pantheistic, panentheistic, and nondualist currents and their plural lineages in India, lead into *how* questions central to multi-religious pluralism were reopened or **(p.**

246) recast by Gandhi as well as the difficulties of crafting a non-sectarian *imaginaire* within an increasingly communal context.

The metaphysical basis of Gandhi's model of the transcendent unity of an ultimate reality not bound by any single book, prophet, or incarnation which relativizes all religions and paths to god was *confessedly* shaped as much by a humanism interested in the parity of cultures as by non-dualistic currents of Advaita and nirguna devotion, which, according to Gandhi, had taught that the souls of all human beings were equal with each '*atman*' manifesting the pervasive divinity of '*Brahman*'.¹⁶ At this level, religions were to be interpreted on the principle of 'a fundamental unity running through all the diversity'; these fundamental unities rested on monotheism and were based on what was common to all—love, innocence, truth, non-violence, the eternal duel between good and evil, and the intention of giving a purpose to human life;¹⁷ and they were unconditionally true, regardless of the position and interests of a believing subject. Though they arrive at it from different directions, al-'Arabi and Gandhi are proximate in the desire to save religions from a solipsistic irreducible particularity.¹⁸ Each believer was to be judged from the 'standpoint' of his own **(p.247)** religion; while each had the 'privilege to proclaim and practice the truths' of other religions, none had the right to 'criticise or condemn' or reform the elements of any religion but his/her own.¹⁹

Gandhi attempted to devise a non-sectarian Hinduism that was elastic and inclusive of all that was exemplary in other religions:

My Hinduism is not sectarian. It includes all that I know to be best in Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism.²⁰

Not being an exclusive religion, it enables the followers of that faith not merely to respect all the other religions, but it enables them to admire and assimilate whatever may be good in the other faiths.²¹

However, while it was easy for Gandhi to ascribe special absorptive powers—stemming from a tolerance of all faiths or an inherent antagonism to proselytization—to Hinduism, it was much more difficult to harness either of these to a non-sectarian agenda since the discourse of a benevolent Hinduism was being deployed from *both* communal and non-communal positions. In this discourse, an absorptive, uncoercive, non-proselytizing, inclusive Hinduism could function to suppress histories of subjugating, marginalizing, or incorporating others, the punitive nature of caste and gender relations, as well as flatten the complex affinities and antagonisms between various sects.

Yet by insisting on tolerance and non-violence as the vital principle of all religions, Gandhi differentiated himself from communalists who represented tolerance as the philosophical core of Hinduism alone.²² He repeatedly argued against the communal stereotyping of whole groups,²³ and contested communal

narratives by re-reading India's **(p.248)** medieval history as integral to its cultural unity.²⁴ However, when it came to divining the special essence of Hinduism, Gandhi's non-sectarian project faltered: unlike the younger religions of Christianity and Islam, he claimed, Hinduism through its sheer longevity and the lessons of experience had 'outlived' its own 'imperialism' and either renounced violence or restricted and monitored it through the occupational divisions of *varna*!²⁵ His position became especially vulnerable whenever he invoked the two different principles of conceptual equivalence and temporal anteriority simultaneously: there could be a slide from a claim for *parity* between religions made by extracting universals from all religions to a claim for an *exceptional* universalizeability for Hinduism by giving it some unique properties, properties which carried the unmistakable imprint of German Indology and Theosophy.²⁶ In other words, there could be a slide from the universality of all religions to Hinduism itself as the standard or paradigm for determining universals.²⁷

The theory of an absorptive Hinduism as the ground for religious pluralism was equally problematic. Even though Gandhi's ascription of **(p.249)** special enfolding and absorptive capacities to Hinduism was to become self-consciously and increasingly non-sectarian by the 1940s, it was nevertheless both politically questionable and conceptually difficult to disentangle from Hindu ideologues who were using similar strategies to 'other' Christians and Muslims. Hinduism's so-called infinite capacity for inclusion and absorption (vindicated by the blatantly partisan search for the Hindu roots of national culture by Indologists like Radhakumud Mukherji) was becoming part of the paraphernalia of the Hindu right and carried to extreme lengths by M.S. Golwalkar; the philosophic knowledge of the absolute or the monism of the Advaita *interpreted* as Hinduism's special claim to omniscience was becoming a popular vector of universalization,²⁸ while de-Islamicization or re-conversion featured actively in their agenda. Broadly speaking, Hindu chauvinist theories of cultural interaction plotted one of two historical trajectories. In one rendering, Hinduism was presented as a flexible entity whose amorphousness had allowed it to absorb the challenges of all 'native' religious groups including the tribal and to act as a synthesizer of diverse linguistic and cultural groups that retained their respective religious identities *within* its overarching fold. Hinduism became the dominating 'federative' principle that either 'controlled' and compartmentalized diverse creeds or itself exemplified unity in diversity, while all 'other' forms of diversity, namely Islam and Christianity, were intrusive, indigestible, and in fact a threat to this supposedly internally plural and self-sufficing Hinduism. It posited Hinduism not as a loose conglomeration of partly related and partly disparate sects but as a *single* entity, if not a pluralist giant, crippled by rigid 'foreign' (that is, Semitic) religions that were radically different. The second rendering also centred Hinduism as the *primum mobile* of all assimilative processes but described it as having either accommodated or tamed Islam and

Christianity or as possessing the age and philosophical capacity to absorb them and/or to have been the **(p.250)** progenitor of all religions. Both renditions were designed to indict Islam and Christianity and instigate polarizations. Consequently they not only obliterated the contentious, even violent, history of the proliferation of Hinduism (however it was to be defined), but also clothed voracious Brahminisms and sectarian orthodoxies in the aura of tolerance and made 'Hinduization' seem at once natural, historical, and, more ominously, necessary.²⁹

The spills and overlaps between such Hindu schemas that made religious unity a precondition and pivot of cultural and political unity, and non-sectarian theories impelled by the nationalist drive for positing a cultural unity that could be a correlate of subcontinental political unity can be traced to varied sources. Of these, one was the persisting reliance, across the political and ideological spectrum, on an Advaitic monism to establish unity—whether Hindu or Indian, ancient or modern, philosophical or territorial, psychological or civilizational. The location of the essence or spirit of 'Hinduism' in the Advaita Vedanta, a form of colonial universalism, had developed in an interplay of legitimations. It was used as a standard for classifying and measuring nineteenth-century Indian reformers by a branch of German Indology (indebted to Schopenhauer), which itself drew on the aggrandizements of Shankaracharya and his followers, and was, in turn, employed by Indian reformers to facilitate various types of synthesis. With Max Mueller, the Vedanta became a polysemic ground for ethical universalism, religious continuity, and reconciliation with **(p.251)** Christianity. The Vedanta was the philosophical base for a synthesis of Hinduism and Christianity while the Vedantic spirit, according to him, had persisted in an 'unbroken continuity' till the nineteenth century and was a feature not merely of high or reformed Hinduism but also of popular belief.³⁰ Later, Monier Williams, who saw the Vedanta as the sign of true Hindu orthodoxy, isolated the Vedanta and Vaishnavism as the twin engines of *Hindu* assimilation, syncretism, pluralism, and tenacity.³¹ In a singular reconfiguration of Mueller and **(p.252)** Williams, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, who also identified Hinduism with Advaita, described the Vedanta as definitionally non-sectarian, universalist, and the axis for the reconciliation of all sects even if they interpreted it differently; though professedly non-sectarian and internationalist, he established it as a *hierarchical* principle of unity in plurality that could be alternately invoked as a 'democratic' standard for maintaining differences and as an inexorably uniformist reformism.³² The Vedanta rakes in, straightens, and elevates every cult that comes into its path! Though this view scarcely tallied with the history or self-perception of the numerous often competing or bifurcating sects clubbed together as 'Hindu' under the aegis of the Vedanta, it was widely accepted. Even Nehru described the Vedanta as a 'kind of metaphysical democracy' that minimized caste, ridiculed priestcraft and ritualism, maximized individual liberty

of worship, and represented the dominant philosophic outlook of contemporary Hinduism (Nehru 1946, 68, 145, 154).

The Vedanta thus was becoming a powerful, *multi-vocal* theoretical system for the management of religious diversity. It could function **(p.253)** as a foundation for Hindu pluralism, a vector of an ‘intra-Hindu’ syncretism, or itself be the sign of a plural Hinduism that could never be communal because it excluded nothing. In this latter beneficent guise, it lent itself to the assumption that the Vedanta had encompassed, even exhausted, all possible forms of religious pluralism. However, the Vedanta could also function as the base for genuinely desired intra-religious syncretisms and was even perceived as an available pathway from a Hindu to a multi-religious pluralism. In addition, it was becoming the ancient mark of modernity and could be presented as either the foreshadow or the trajectory to a secular modern. In sum, the Vedanta functioned, depending on intentions, and often with a bewildering simultaneity, as a communal, anti-communal, anti-modern, and secular resource.

The vexed and entangled yet frequently shared account of Hinduism as eclectic, lacking exclusivity in doctrine and practice, possessing an accommodative pantheism as well as a Vedic or Vedantic catholicism that permitted diverse philosophical and metaphysical doctrines and proclaimed the tenet of one god with many names, usually functioned in deeply problematic ways. First, it construed Hinduism not as a largely retrospective constellation but as an ancient, unitary, and changeless entity that had graciously enfolded or domesticated emerging and incoming religions without the use of state power or violence; this rested partly on anachronic misconceptions formalized by colonial indigenism into a Hindu historiography. Thus, for Monier Williams, ‘Hindu’ plurality was not a process of increasing diversification but simply of sponge-like ingestion, digestion, and assimilation.³³ Equally significantly, this ‘plural’ Hinduism found its ultimate unity and coherence in the caste order. Nowhere is this more evident than in the near axiomatic view held by Monier Williams and several nationalists including Vivekananda that Hinduism allowed for an infinite variety of beliefs as long as its social—caste and gender—norms were obeyed (see **(p.254)** Williams 1971, 85; Williams 1974, 53–57).³⁴ Second, it produced a false binary between the soft boundaries of Hinduism and the hard profiles of Islam and Christianity, obscuring the fact that these religions themselves could often be flexible, multi-vocal, and multivalent entities and variegated sects, mysticisms, or churches with catholic potentials for reformulation that stemmed from their prior histories in Asia and Europe, and took distinct shapes in mobile mercantile, courtly or colonial constellations in India. Third, it obscured the fact that the subcontinent was *always* a *multi-religious* terrain of adjustment, contest, iconoclasm, and rejection, and that most of the catholic and absorptive properties ascribed to ‘Hinduism’ were not ‘internal’ to it but the more general feature of social relations in successive multi-religious formations on the subcontinent which had produced overlaps, intersections, and webs of

interdependence, commonality, and difference that could complicate or impede the production of absolute alterity. The identification of eclecticism as a distinctive tertiary component of a cohesive and pervasive Hinduism, rather than as an index and effect of the material compulsions of the coexistence and *interaction* of numerous sects, also blocked a rigorous theorization of the emergence of *new* multi-religious spaces which could not be allocated to any single prior sect. The dynamism of these diverse, shared, or overlapping networks of belief and practice in which all sects were subject to the pressures of dispersal and recombination was instead appropriated to Hinduism alone.

In sum, theories of plural Hinduism were formulated in artificial contradistinction to Islam and Christianity and secreted both an insidious particularism and a cultural exceptionalism in which the inclusions were as troublesome as the exclusions. They usually inhibited overt admission of other non-dualist, pluralist, pantheist, or panentheistic currents as well as the complex histories or narratives of comparable, congruent, or parallel philosophies; of classification, **(p.255)** translation, and commentary; of equivalences, inter-animation, interaction, intersection, mediation, shared legacies, resonance, divergence, experimentation, dissent, contestation, and the instatement of hierarchies. After all, comparisons between the pantheistic mysticism of the Upanishads and wujudi Sufism were afloat from at least the sixteenth century, had several passages through the Chishti and Qadiri orders and Mughal courts in diverse languages and class positions ranging from the princely (Dara Shukoh's transcreation in Persian) to the popular.³⁵ In the appropriation of multi-religious pluralism, and its misnaming as Hindu pluralism, the scepticism and enlargements effected by Islamic pluralism were narrowed or invisibilized, while Hinduism turned into a puffy holdall.

In the eclectic path to 'his' Hinduism, Gandhi absorbed and skirted, often inconsistently, colonial and orientalist discourses of ingestion and elision which both preceded him and were still being shaped into a hegemonic descriptor. Gandhi's commitment to an integrative politics did at times push him into arguments that resembled those of Hindu nationalists and laid him open to the charge of seeking a unity of religions from a Hindu standpoint that alienated Muslims and had an ambiguous relation with 'Hindu' elements in the Congress. However, a fundamental difference remained: he was not seeking to unite Hindus against Muslims, but first with each other and then with all other religions while the assimilateness of India and the nation transcended the absorptive capacities of Hinduism. Significantly, when Gandhi distanced Hindu historiography, he often did so with the aid of what are now perceived as standard secular arguments offered by nationalists like Nehru. He would describe Indian nationhood or civilizational unity as a pre-British rather than a pre-Mughal feature, **(p.256)** deny homogeneity to Hinduism, give primacy to political affiliations, and contest the correlation between religion and nationhood.³⁶ Or he de-monolithized Islam, described it as variant and

contextual, and located 'Indian civilization' in a permeable and wider 'Eastern' constellation, albeit one that could still be pitted against the 'west':

Indian civilisation ... is a mingling of the cultures represented by different faiths and influenced by the geographic and other environment in which the cultures have met. Thus Islamic culture is not the same in Arabia, Turkey, Egypt and India but is itself influenced by the conditions of the respective countries. Indian culture is therefore Indian. It is neither Hindu, Islamic nor any other, wholly. It is a fusion of all and essentially Eastern.³⁷

Further, though the historical co-ordinates of Gandhi's universalism had been in the making since the late nineteenth century and were already problematic, the principle of equivalence on which he based his universalism had also been pulling particularities in a contrary and more dynamic direction from as early as the 1920s:

But if belief in One God and the race of His Prophets in a never-ending chain is sufficient for Islam, then we are all Musalmans, but we are also Hindus and Christians.³⁸

And it was in this direction, that, in the 1940s, he was to find the more creative emphasis of multiple belonging. The resonance of pluralist Islamic/Sufi currents too became more apparent.

In the 1940s, many of Gandhi's earlier emphases and positions changed. There were several strands that developed from his earlier **(p.257)** formulations—multiple belonging, syncretism, individuation of the worshipper, separation of religion from politics and from culture—which, in *combination*, fundamentally challenged Hindu exceptionalism and unpacked his own religious particularism even when he continued to assert it.³⁹ Carrying the potential of resisting the slide from the Indian to the Hindu, they comprised a pluralism that went beyond the permissions of a plural Hinduism into considerably wider multi-religious interpellations.

Pluralist Hinduism itself morphed and acquired a new injunctive purpose in the 1930s. An eclectic syncretism drawing from all religions became 'obligatory'.⁴⁰ Though Gandhi insisted on naming his own 'synthesis' of all religions 'Hinduism', he also said that a similar synthesis by a Christian would be called 'Christianity'.⁴¹ If the same synthesis could have different names, then these names were already on the way to becoming virtually synonymous terms while the singular labels under which individual combinations cohered were becoming superficial. His emphases now also fell on the practical consequences of an absorptive Hinduism: having assimilated the best in other faiths, it had *lost* its exclusivity and become inherently incapable of quarrelling with 'Islam and its followers'.⁴² His claim for a tolerant Hinduism was centred more on the willed *creation* of a civic and tolerant Hindu rather than on establishing the uniqueness

and catholicity of Hinduism *per se*—thereby setting up a logic in which a Hindu could become increasingly *less* different from and *more* like his ‘others’. The notion of simultaneous belonging, stated at least as early as 1924,⁴³ now pushed the absorptive capacity of Hinduism into a position where coexistence and mutual respect between all religions shaded into a stronger non-hierarchical theory of multiple belonging **(p.258)** filtered through an ethical universalism. Here ‘*equal homage*’ could be paid to the ‘best’ in all religions,⁴⁴ making it possible to belong, non-conflictually, to all of them.

I consider myself as good a Muslim as I am a Hindu and for that matter I regard myself an equally good Christian or Parsi.⁴⁵

Gandhi claimed that multiple belonging had become personally possible for him through being a *sanatani* (orthodox).⁴⁶ However, it was not restricted to being a *sanatani* since in every case an ethically universalist Hinduism was ‘true’ while a sectarian one was false.⁴⁷ Thus, without disputing the discrete identities of sects or religions, he used universalism to criss-cross their boundaries. Further, his claim to simultaneous belonging denied narrow notions of identity to all religions or the view that religions were the exclusive property of those born into them thereby pushing the primordial into freer forms of association.⁴⁸ His claim thus contested the politics of communalism which asserted that individuals were empowered to speak from and politically represent only their own religious ‘communities’. Multiple belonging instead gave the dual entitlement to interpret and to *believe* in ‘other’ religions.⁴⁹ Since multiple belonging rested on an unwavering belief in the common monotheist lineage of all religions, **(p.259)** addressed Hindus and Muslims, it definitionally *forbade* communal ‘othering’ both from a standpoint of discrete religions and, as I will show later, also from a standpoint of soft boundaries and shared practices.

Gandhi’s notion of universality began to comprehend not only the plurality of religions but also the diversity within them, a diversity that rested on the multiplicity and particularity of *individual* modes of worship. The individuation of the worshipper had been a central and continuous feature of Gandhi’s thought, and sometimes seemed to echo or paraphrase al-‘Arabi: ‘In reality, there are as many religions as there are individuals.’⁵⁰ His earlier emphasis was on the multiplicity of religions as an *effect* of the diversity of individual conceptions of god:

In theory, since there is one God, there can only be one religion. But in practice no two persons I have known have the same or identical conception of God. Therefore, there will, perhaps, always be different religions answering to different temperaments and climatic conditions. But I can clearly see the time coming when people belonging to different faiths

will have the same regard for other faiths that they have for their own. I think we have to find unity in diversity.⁵¹

This shifted to a new emphasis where the differences generated by these religions in fact *blocked* a recognition of the irrepressible diversity of individual 'religions':

Just as a tree has a million leaves, similarly though God is one, there are as many religions as there are men and women, though they are rooted in one God. We do not see this plain truth because we are followers of different prophets and claim as many religions as there are prophets. As a matter of fact, whilst I believe myself to be a Hindu, I know that I do not worship God in the same manner as any or all of them.⁵²

Multiplicity could only be played out through a renewed guarantee of individual combinatoires and a refusal of uniformity to all creeds. This pluralism was partly derived from the monism of the Advaita (**p.260**) with its logic of a single soul animating many bodies and a single 'truth' or inexpressible religion which lay behind its multiple imperfect formulations: god could appear in as many forms as there were possibilities in human thought since the divine atman was in every individual.⁵³ The monist vein in Gandhi's thought functions mainly to explain or legitimate the existing plurality of religious practices and to overcome internal divisions. If the principle of religious individuation was the heart, and the heart inhabited a self-implicated in effort, selection, and contexts of lived particularity, then the atman and the self were not complementary or mutually grounding principles but flowed from diverse sources with distinct historical provenances (see Sangari 2002, 5–6). The principle of individuation and particularity, overdetermined by the Protestant reformation and radical reformist tendencies of Phule and Ambedkar, was also partly supplied by medieval devotion and its concern with the names of god in varied philosophical, theological, and epistemic registers, and these were far less Hindu than Gandhi claimed.

Guru Nanak says that God may be called by the name of Allah, Rahim and so on. The name does not matter if he is enshrined in our hearts. Guru Nanak's efforts, like those of Kabir had been directed towards synthesizing religions. ... Some go on pilgrimages and bathe in the sacred river, others go to Mecca; some worship him in temples ... some call themselves Hindus, others Muslims. Nanak says that he [who] truly follows God's law knows his secret. This teaching is universal in Hinduism.⁵⁴

(p.261) There is a connecting line here to Bulhe Shah's shape shifting god as well as al-'Arabi's formulations on the multiplicity of divine names.

Man is multiple and single of essence, while God is single of Essence, but multiple with respect to the divine Names. (al-'Arabi 1980, 210)⁵⁵

Gandhi's individuation of believers is proximate though not identical with that of al-'Arabi to which I will return briefly here.

Ibn al-'Arabi points to some possibilities for individuation within trajectories of faith. In Chittick's words, for him, every human being represents 'a unique knot or word, a unique self-disclosure and belief. It is true that beliefs, like things in general, tend to be similar and can be put into categories. Nevertheless, no two individuals have exactly the same belief, for each individual represents a self-disclosure of reality that can never be repeated' (Chittick 1994, 164). In my lay understanding, the nature of this individuation not only allows for 'god created in belief' and thus multiple paths, but also for a *coincidence* of the infinite facets of an immanent god and individual predispositions. Individuation seems to be an *effect* of unitary essence and its multiple manifestations. al-'Arabi does not split the 'Divine Essence' from the singularity of each beholder;⁵⁶ yet he maintains a gap between human comprehension and 'Divine Reality'. Consequently, neither **(p.262)** individual uniqueness nor multiple paths are goals; they are the point from which movement toward gnosis begins.⁵⁷ To fabricate god is to become an agent in a specific context—a form of individuation predicated on the infinite transformations of the 'Divine' which, in turn, involves affirming all his manifestations:

He who restricts the Reality [to his own belief] denies Him [when manifested] in other beliefs, affirming Him only when He is manifest in his own belief. He who does not restrict Him thus does not deny Him, but affirms His Reality in every formal transformation, worshipping Him in His infinite forms, since there is no limit to the forms in which He manifests Himself. (al-'Arabi 1980, 149)

The positioning of individual believers in al-'Arabi does not suggest the emergence of unencumbered self-determination; rather a form of individuation which preceded the European enlightenment and Protestant Christianity yet differed from them, a form that had not become anachronistic in the first half of the twentieth century. This form in its survivals, successions, and dilutions was still open to being re-read or translated into some meanings of the Indian secular: whether as respect for all religions or as necessary enlargements of faiths in relation to each other. Since 'Hinduism' was still under construction, could it be the interstices produced between sects by variant practices and enlargements of faith over the centuries that allowed Gandhi to propose multiple belonging? Could the discourse of a plural Hinduism have emerged without the shaping presence of 'other' pluralisms which it both annexed and disavowed? How much **(p.263)** of its uniqueness was earned by distancing its predecessors or stamping out their long shadows, shadows which disturbed its self-image?

Further, how much of what was seen as authorized by Advaita *alone* was merely an effect of the hierarchical subsumption of the personal realization emphasized in bhakti-sant-sufi traditions into the Vedanta. Gandhi's concept of divinity which professedly combined Advaitic abstraction with a 'personal' god who resided 'deep in the hearts of men' drew on diverse traditions,⁵⁸ and had an equally emphatic and composite lineage in medieval devotional compositions where the heart (*dil* or *man*) was developed as an affective principle of internalization and embodiment that could contest external social, juridical, and religious norms and institutions (see Sangari 1990, 1473-4).

To seek God one need not go on pilgrimage or light lamps fed with ghee and burn incense before the image of the deity or paint it with vermilion. For He resides in our hearts. If we could humbly obliterate in us the consciousness of our physical body, we would see Him face to face.⁵⁹

This central feature of many devotional and mystic traditions—the individual as ultimate arbiter of his own faith—was by definition egalitarian, priestless, and unorganized. For Gandhi, even the special absorptiveness of Hinduism breaks up into the molecules of individual practice. However, it still did not provide an exit from any religion including Hinduism—each Hindu was unique but remained a Hindu—that is, a fluid flexibility without conversion. Indeed, Gandhi's notion of multiple belonging seems deliberately designed to make conversion superfluous at a time when this was a politically **(p.264)** explosive issue. Represented as a betrayal and as an apocalyptic event indicating a complete rupture with the previous faith, conversions were frequently enforced through communal pressure or violence, entailed blasphemy, and flaunted rites of defilement (of religious symbols or practices). In rejecting most conversions, Gandhi's was also rejecting the politics of communalism insofar as they rested on an agenda of mutual derogation, homogenizing religious belief, and recovering an unsullied past.⁶⁰ Gandhi had presented himself as an active nurturer of different creeds from the standpoint of a reformed Hinduism or as only helping each person to excel in his own faith.⁶¹ He was quite anxious to prove that though his own teaching was religious it was inclusive and thus non-partisan, and had nothing to do with conversion.⁶² Yet it was possible to identify with other religions and freely adopt parts of religions: in this logic, as a monotheist who believed Muhammed to be one of god's prophets and messengers, Gandhi was a Muslim who could not be *formally* converted to Islam.⁶³ **(p.265)** At this level, for Gandhi, the finalism of a formal conversion accompanied by repudiation, pre-empted and inhibited multiple belonging.

Gandhi's standpoint of adopting parts of religions and his resistance to conversion on this ground is also usually subsumed within the Advaitic principles of unity-diversity by those who see him as representing the plurality of Hinduism. His continuous self-location inside a Sanatani-Vaishnav-Vedantic constellation and his personal proclivities are undeniable; he had even asserted

that his faith in Hinduism was the precondition of love for other religions.⁶⁴ Yet reducing Gandhi's standpoint on multiple belonging and conversion to his own self-naming makes it difficult to see either the qualitative expansion and interpellative potentials of his address or his own implication in the history of a multi-religious pluralism.⁶⁵ In his emphasis on the individual, Gandhi evoked, perhaps indirectly drew upon, a medieval history of conversion which had continued alongside religious 'separatism' in the colonial period. There had been and still were types of 'conversion' that were neither punitive nor pragmatic. These rested on diverse modes of mutual incorporation and gradual assimilation in popular religions that made multiple belonging of many types possible: complex spiritual lineages cutting across discrete sects that loosened denominational identity; partial adherences—to selected tenets, local cults, shrine veneration, holy men, festivals, ritual, and everyday practices—without changing primordial denomination; and individual abilities to take from and/or combine from different sects, mix, and hold concurrent beliefs, without any **(p. 266)** official change of denomination or formally joining another sect, that is, by remaining an individual practitioner of a *combinatoire*.⁶⁶ These logics could of course enfold groups and were not restricted to individuals, and what is more, they were still extant.⁶⁷ Within such a context of religious plurality, Gandhi's notion of multiple belonging to discrete religions without conversion could, paradoxically yet effectively, itself be interpreted as a recognizable type of informal 'conversion' through the expansion, multiplication, and pluralization of affiliations. It could, even without intending to do so, interpellate unclassifiable, overlapping, interrelated, and eclectic religious practices and give an explicit moral rationale to the potential individual *combinaisons* that were already available. Thus, the *combination* of multiple belonging with individual freedom could speak to discrete religions and to amorphous ones as well as to different levels of individuation and emergent embourgeoisements.

Further, the individual worshipper, even as an undertheorized concept, could partially resolve the incompatibility of the two concepts of religious plurality that Gandhi himself oscillated **(p.267)** between—that of major religions and of popular religions. These two types of plurality begin to leak into each other insofar as the individual worshipper could be accommodated in that space which was not confined to discrete religions but was a product of diverse interactions. His perspective thus began to extend from an emphasis on the single root of all religions to a tacit acknowledgement of their syncretic composition and the structural interconnections or areas of convergence that had been created by coexistence and interaction. As part of his peace plan in his last fast, Gandhi demanded restoration of Khwaja Qutubuddin Bakhtiar's vandalized dargah in time for Urs, specifying that the Mehrauli dargah was 'visited not only by Muslims but by thousands of Hindus and other non-Muslims in equal veneration'.⁶⁸

Gandhi's prayer meetings too aimed to create a space for interaction. He had repeatedly stressed the need to share or enter into the experience of belonging to another religion, and to look at all religions with an 'equal eye', that is, with *sarva dharma samabhava* (belief in the equality of religions) (Gandhi 1932, 39), and suggested:

If you read the Koran, you must read it with the eye of the Muslim, if you read the Bible, you must read it with the eye of a Christian, if you read the Gita, you must read it with the eye of a Hindu.⁶⁹

The possession of numerous eyes had already implied an ability to inhabit the gaze of 'other' believers. As his claim to equal belonging intensified in 1946, it combined with multiple standpoints and long-held notions of equivalence, then melded into a type of interchangeability that undermined all exclusivisms. The old insistence on a deliteralized Rama, a 'formless omnipresent' essence commensurate with all belief combines with presenting Rama as one of many names (**p.268**) and as a fabrication, which belonged 'equally' to all.⁷⁰ The *kalma* (an Islamic confession of faith) and *gayatri* (hymn from the Rigveda) were one in essence,⁷¹ and the Christian lord's prayer 'contains everything that the few letters of the Gayatri Mantra mean'.⁷² Precisely because his perspective was laden with belief, it went beyond tokenism: proper belonging to one signified belonging to all while multiple belonging began to signify multiple *active* faiths,⁷³ and make for a positive common stake in different religions.

Multiple belonging, predicated on ethical universals and equivalences, assumes discrete religions, asserts defined boundaries, then paradoxically pushes towards loosening them through a medieval cum modernist logic of similitude and interchangeability. Within this, discrete religious sites, texts, and practices could stand in for each other, and thus each could become more than one, and ideally, each would be participatory and none could have a commanding status.

Multiple belonging had rich potentials for a multi-religious and anti-communal standpoint but did it have the potential to undo gender and caste hierarchies? A commitment to multiple belonging would have to consider the articulation of patriarchal practices and caste with religions. Patriarchal ideologies construed women as maintaining the boundaries of caste, sect, and religion through obedience and endogamy, as well as instrumentalized them as possessions to be protected against encroachment by 'others'. Caste discrimination was tied to endogamy as well as rituals of purity and pollution. Examining the deep structures of womanhood and peculiar understanding of sexuality and celibacy, the attachment to the fourfold division of varna as controlling individual ambition and economic competition, the supposed corruption of varna by multiple castes or *jatis*, and the (**p.269**) often untenable differences with Ambedkar in Gandhi's thought and practice is beyond the scope of this chapter. Instead, I will conclude by flagging some significant shifts in the 1940s that add

some layers—sketchy, knotty or unresolved—to the concept of multiple belonging.⁷⁴

Gandhi had never withheld individuation from women worshippers but it was unclear how far it would go and how much the 'Hinduness' of womanhood or the norms of wifely duty would undercut it. In his early writing, the legendary Mirabai's forsaking of her husband is in one place compared to Buddha's love-filled desertion of his family and in another subsumed into wifeliness: she is described as not abandoning him at all but only as setting out 'to discover the true meaning of devotion to one's husband'.⁷⁵ Later, he upheld the right of a woman to accept a *gurumantra* (a word or a phrase bestowing the grace of a preceptor on a pupil) and to refuse to share it with her husband despite the latter's resentment.⁷⁶ In 1947, Gandhi went further and discarded the etiquettes of patriarchal permission that could de-individuate women worshippers. He told women: 'You should get rid of the distinctions of Hindu, Mussalman, Parsi or Jew. Follow the religion that appeals to you.'⁷⁷ He also withdrew his lifelong opposition to interreligious marriage, thus acknowledging that different faiths could coexist in a family.⁷⁸

The status and place of untouchables, renamed Harijans in Gandhi's discourse, was negotiated in a wider narrative of social rather than personal salvation and often directed at caste Hindus. Reform, conceived as voluntary identification and inwardness with the poor and disadvantaged, could dissolve untouchability (Gandhi 1991, 61; Gandhi 1927 [1980], 316). He declared himself a 'Harijan by choice' and recommended this downward identification to all caste Hindus as the best way of 'amalgamating the two in one body'.⁷⁹ **(p.270)** Gandhi's utopian vision of levelling through downward identification resonated with another older and gendered set of relations between self-abasement, subalternity, and salvation in which the feminization of devotion made willed servitude the metaphoric ground of transcendence.⁸⁰ In a kafi, the sixteenth-century Shah Husain, the son of a wool weaver, identifies in a female voice with the lowest point in caste hierarchy: 'Chuhri haan darbar di' (I am the sweeper woman at the Lord's court) (Dhillon 1992, no page). However, caste now had a new public and political location in which the transforming power of subordination could not overrule the demand for equality. From the late nineteenth century, anti-caste movements had uncovered and condemned a host of discriminations which included prohibitions on commensality, inter-marriage, and temple entry.

Gandhi did not separate untouchability from Hinduism; indeed, he described this as its most repellent aspect.

I love Christianity, Islam and many other faiths through Hinduism. Take it away and nothing remains for me. But I cannot tolerate it with untouchability.⁸¹

His projects of eradicating untouchability and reforming Hinduism were connected, and both were preconditions of multiple belonging.

Further, the unequal social ground had to be levelled and remade if multiple belonging was to be anything more than an idealist or paternalist sentiment. In 1946, he recommended inter-marriage between caste-Hindu and Harijan men and women. The stigma would gradually vanish and: 'Finally there will be only one caste known by the beautiful name of Bhangi, that is to say the reformer or remover of dirt.'⁸² This epiphanic culmination suggests that Gandhi was now working to reformulate particularity both in the arena of religion and in the domain of caste; however, here the logic was not of interchangeability and equivalence but of identification with the most marginalized combined with the steady dissolution of caste distinctions through exogamy.

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Notes:

(¹) Austin (1980, 3–16, 22–3). Andalusia had a Muslim, Christian, and Jewish populace and was ruled by the Almohads, whose relation with Sufis was tense.

(²) Ibn Al-'Arabi (1911, 67–70); and Rizvi (1978, 1, 108–9). The gazelles are objects of Love and also forms of Divine and prophetic wisdom; camels are the aspirations that journey away from the body; the religion of Love refers to a verse in the Koran: 'Follow me, then God will love you' (Nicholson 1911, 69). On speculations that the cloister may refer to an Islamic convent to which either the learned young woman who inspired the Tarjuman or a wife of al-'Arabi retired, see Addas (2012, 211).

(³) I have adapted the translation in Matringe (1992, 196).

(⁴) *Young India* (henceforth YI), 2 September 1926, in Gandhi (1959), 238, italics mine.

(⁵) Interview 17 July 1946, in Iyer (1987), vol. 1, 76.

(⁶) *Hindustan*, 8 September 1946, in Gandhi (1958–84), vol. 85, 276–7.

(⁷) According to Irfan Habib, al-‘Arabi’s pantheistic doctrines and speculations encapsulated in *wahdat al-wujud* offered persuasive *explanation* of diversity as belonging only to the sphere of illusion (Habib 2008, 181–2). The pantheistic and panentheistic potentials of this concept have been debated for several centuries and remain open to varied interpretation. See fns 8 and 10.

(⁸) Green notes that from the thirteenth century, the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud* also served as an enabling mechanism for inter-religious harmony between Muslims and the different religions they encountered in the Maghreb and the Mediterranean. On the centrality of *wahdat al-wujud* to the Chishtis, and Ahmad Sirhindi’s criticism, see Alam (2012, 9, 12, 14–15). On Shah Waliullah’s opposition, see Kalam (2013, 28–9). On the consolidation of *wahdat al-wujud* by the *dars-i-nizammiya* curriculum of the Firangi Mahallis, who were allied to Chishti and Qadri ways and heavily influenced by al-‘Arabi, from the eighteenth to the early twentieth century, see Robinson (1991, 101–2).

(⁹) Perhaps because Panjab was annexed by the British as late as the 1840s, Qadri and Chishti Sufi verse continued to be composed until the early twentieth century. On syncretic or shared beliefs and practices in Panjab, and multi-religious invocations in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Panjabi *quissas*, verse or prose narratives, see Matringe (1992, 197–8, 204–5) and Mir (2000, 741–8).

(¹⁰) Cited in Rizvi (1983, vol. 2, 41). In Ronald Nettle’s persuasive interpretation, al-‘Arabi’s unitive principle does not negate the separation of God from his creation, rather it weaves together in tense and complex ways *absolute* being and *conditional* being, that is, oneness and multiplicity; God as remote unknowable *essence* and God in his *manifest* attributes, that is, God and his creation *and* god as conceived in religions. The One and the many inevitably meet. This may be through the omnipresence or immanence of the One; the coalescence of the One/many in the manifestation of One. The whole world of multiplicity may be seen as the inseparable shadow of the One; or the world of multiplicity in conditional being may be the true God’s outward form (Nettler 2003, 7–12). Austin sees al-‘Arabi as more than a pantheist monist since he has a strongly transcendental view of divinity (‘Introduction’, 1980, 26–7). On the polysemy of *wujud*—as existence, being, perception and the created universe (in opposition to its creator) which led to varying interpretations by his defenders and opponents, see Addas (2012, 208) and Austin (1980, 26).

(¹¹) *Al-Futuhāt al-makkiya*, cited in Chittick (1994, 163). See also, Chittick (1994, 105).

(¹²) *Al-Futuhāt al-makkiya*, cited in Chittick (1994, 164). As Chittick explains,

The Real becomes manifest to the servants of god in the measure of their knowledge of him. Each human being follows the authority of his or her own belief, and this gives rise to an indefinite variety of often contradictory gods. But this does not imply that these gods are false. People worship what they understand as real, and this understanding is rooted in both the self-manifesting Real and the degree to which a person experiences the Real.

(Chittick 1994, 163-4).

(¹³) See 'Mein nach ke yaar manaane ni' and 'Tera ishq nachaiyaan ve kar thaiya thaiya' in Ghaffar (2005, vol. 1, 103).

(¹⁴) I have largely followed the translation in Ghaffar (2005, vol. 1, 197-8) which, however, has a different version of the refrain—'Bulha ki jaanaan mein kaun'—usually translated as, 'Who am I, Bulhe?'

(¹⁵) Cited in Nicholson (1911, vi). According to Austin, 'It is only by gnosis, or the gradual seeing beyond formal multiplicity, that the Heart is enabled to fulfill its true function' (Austin 1980, 146). Wahdat al-wujud seems to stand at the beginning of spiritual stations (*maqamat*) at which imperfections are to be overcome—the orientation of the Sufi is towards unity. For al-'Arabi,

God is absolute or restricted, as He pleases; and the God of religious belief is subject to limitations, for He is the God who is contained in the heart of His servant. But the Absolute God is not contained by anything, for He is the being of all things and the being of himself, and a thing is not said either to contain itself or not to contain itself.'(*Fusus al-hikam*, cited in Rizvi 1983, 2, 50)

(¹⁶) YI 29 September 1927, in Gandhi(1955, 117).

(¹⁷) YI 20 August 1925, in Gandhi (1958-84, vol. 28, 93); YI 20 October 1921; Gandhi (1994, 38); *Harijan*, henceforth *Hn*, 13 July 1940; YI 20 December 1928, in Gandhi (1959, 107-8); *Modern Review* October 1941 in Gandhi (1958-84, vol. 75, 70).

(¹⁸) For al-'Arabi, to adhere to the lord through one's own particular religion is a sign of ignorance since the whole world is made of particular self-manifestations of the absolute and this includes idols representing different gods, but they must be recognized as one among the many manifested forms of god (*Fusus al-hikam*, paraphrased in Rizvi 1983, vol. 2, 51.) See also fn 15.

Believing that no single religion could be the sole receptacle for a boundless divinity, Gandhi rejected the 'exclusive divinity' of any scripture and reasoned with a Roman Catholic priest: 'But why do you say that the will of God is expressed in one book called the Bible and not in others? Why do you

circumscribe the power of God?' (*Hind Swaraj* 1938, henceforth *HS*, 69; *YI* 6 October 1921, in Gandhi (1955, 152); *Hn* 13 March 1937, in Gandhi [1959, 68]).

(¹⁹) *YI* 21 January 1926 and *Hn* 13 March 1937, in Gandhi (1955, 20).

(²⁰) *Hn* 30 April 1938. He also presented Hinduism as tolerant of early Christianity (*Hn*, 13 March 1937, in Gandhi 1959, 238–39).

(²¹) *YI* 20 October 1927 in Gandhi 1959, 6. Here he included Buddhism and Jainism in Hinduism.

(²²) On the matching essences of Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity, see *YI* 8 April 1926 and 10 March 1927; *Hn* 11 November 1939 and 17 November 1946; *YI* 26 January 1922, 29 May 1924, 25 September 1924 and 20 January 1927; *Hn* 13 July 1940.

(²³) *HS*, 65, 69; *YI* 11 May 1921, 26 February 1925, and 24 December 1931; *Hn* 9 March 1947.

(²⁴) He said that India was a multi-religious society and would have been so even without Muslim or British rule, for instance, many Hindus had embraced Islam even before the advent of Muslim rule; he also claimed that if India was one nation now it had already been so during the Mughal period and all the Muslim and Mughal emperors not only regarded it as an indivisible whole but had made no attempt to vivisect it (*YI* 26 February 1925; *Hn* 11 November 1939 and 22 September 1940).

(²⁵) See *YI* 19 June 1924, in Gandhi 1959, 16; *Navjivan* 19 February 1922, in Gandhi 1958–84, vol. 22, 426–7.

(²⁶) See, for instance, *Hn* 30 January 1937 in Gandhi 1959, 232. The characterizations of Hinduism range from a singular claim to antiquity and accumulated wisdom to generalizable laws of varna, the four *ashramas*, the theory of transmigration, and 'the unity of *all* life'. *YI* 24 November 1927, *Hn* 28 September 1934 and 26 December 1936, in Gandhi 1955,, 139–40, 142, 150–1; *YI* 7 October 1926, 11 August 1920, and 20 October 1927, in Gandhi 1959, 170, 162, 324.

(²⁷) See *YI* 17 September 1925 in Gandhi 1959, 4.

(²⁸) Radhakumud Mukherji used an Advaitic argument to prove the spiritual unity of Hindus beneath India's apparent diversity while Bipin Chandra Pal maintained that 'Unity' was the ultimate sense of reality and Hinduism 'has always recognised the fundamental Unity that underlies all forms and classes of diversities and differences' (Mukherji 1914, cited in De 1996, 407; Pal 1916 [1958], 66).

(²⁹) M.S. Golwalkar, for instance, described the ‘race’ of Hindus, that is, Aryans, as the original inhabitants of the ‘nation’, and a tolerant, catholic Hinduism ‘in its variety [as] still an organic whole’ despite prolonged and degenerating contact with debased Muslim and European civilizations. He insisted on the religious and linguistic assimilation (‘naturalization’) of outsiders, as well as the elimination of all ‘cultural differences’ and memories of ‘foreign origin’:

The foreign races in Hindusthan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no idea[s] but those of the glorification of Hindu race and culture, i.e. of the Hindu nation and must lose their separate existence to merge in the Hindu race, or may stay in the country wholly subordinated to the Hindu Nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment—not even citizen’s rights.’ (Golwalkar 1939, 8–9, 41, 45–8)

(³⁰) Max Mueller wrote: ‘The Vedanta philosophy was so broad that it could well have served as a common ground for religions so different as Hinduism and Christianity ... both in the form of Gnana (knowledge) and of *bhakti* (devotion).’ For him, the presence of the Vedantic spirit in Rammohun Roy and the Brahmo Samaj established them as inaugurators of a ‘great *revival* of religion’ rather than as innovators, and proved the ‘unbroken continuity between the most modern and the most ancient phases of Hindu thought’ (Mueller 1884 [1952], 51–60, 91, 162–4; Mueller 1882 [1961], 215–16, italics mine).

(³¹) Monier Williams defined ‘Brahmanism’ (a term used by Schopenhauer to designate an absolute monism) as the substratum of Hinduism, thus:

So long as a man holds to the [caste] rules laid down by the ancient law-givers and assents to the great Vedanta doctrine that the one all-pervading impersonal spirit *Brahma* underlies everything in existence, and that the spirit of man is identical with that spirit, he is at liberty to hold any other religious opinions he likes, and may even assent to the truths of Christianity. (Williams 1883 [1974], 53, 60).

The ‘all-comprehensiveness’ and ‘many-sidedness of Vaishnavism’ had, for him, conserved Hinduism but its absorptiveness also made it a formidable opponent of Christianity:

Vaishnavism is ... the most tolerant of systems. It is always ready to accommodate itself to other creeds, and delights in appropriating to itself the religious ideas of all nations in the world. It admits of every form of internal development. It has no organised hierarchy under one supreme head, but it may have any number of separate associations under separate leaders. ... It has no formal confession of faith, but it has an elastic creed capable of adaptation to all varieties of opinion and practice. ... It can be

Brahmanism, be pantheistic, monotheistic, dualistic, polytheistic. It can like Saivism, enjoin ascetism, self-mortification, and austerity. It can, like Saktism, give the reins to self-indulgence, licentiousness, and carnality. It can, like Buddhism, preach liberty, equality, fraternity; or inculcate universal benevolence, and avoidance of injury to others. It can proclaim Buddha or any other teacher or remarkable man to be an incarnation of Vishnu. It can even set its face against idolatry, and look with sympathising condescension on Christianity itself, or hold it to be a development of its own theory of religion suited to Europeans. (Williams 1883 [1974], 99–100)

The combination of the Vedanta and Vaisnavism, for Williams, formed the basis of nineteenth-century monotheist Hindu reforms.

(³²) For Radhakrishnan, all the reciprocities and interchanges with other belief systems took place under the aegis of the Vedanta. These were ‘largely *subordinated* to one Supreme reality of which they were regarded as aspects’. Thus, ‘when one of the cults was taken into Hinduism, alteration set in as the result of the influence of the *higher thought*. The Hindu method of reform is essentially democratic’. Respecting the ‘inalienable rights’ of each community, it used suggestion, persuasion and gradual reform instead of proselytization, conversion and force, and to this end changed the *inner* content of what it absorbed though names remained the same: ‘*Every God accepted by Hinduism is elevated* and ultimately identified with the central Reality *which is one with the deeper self of man*. The addition of new gods to the Hindu pantheon does not endanger it. ... Differences in name become immaterial for the Hindu, since every name at its best connotes the *same* metaphysical and moral perfections’ (Radhakrishnan 1961, 18–19, 30–5, 38, italics mine).

(³³) ‘[Hinduism] has *first borne with* and *then*, so to speak, *swallowed, digested* and *assimilated* something from all creeds ... it has not refused a welcome to applicants of every grade from the highest to the lowest, if only willing to acknowledge the spiritual headship of the Brahmans *and adopt caste rules*’ (Williams 1974, 57, italics mine).

(³⁴) A major ideological effect of plural Hinduism lay in suppressing the ways in which the stake in preserving sectarian differences had often been a stake in preserving structures of caste prejudice and gendered regimes of inequality. Most elaborations of a plural Hinduism implied some kind of defence of the caste system. Radhakrishnan, for instance, accepts caste in the name of harmony and multiplicity (Radhakrishnan 1961, 69–80).

(³⁵) Dara Shukoh saw an identity between Hindu and Muslim seekers of god in *Majma ul Bahrain* (Habib 2008, 187). See also Faruqui (2014, 34–41). Dedhraj (b 1771) in Narnaul district practised a pantheism that was directed against caste and sought to establish the common features of Hinduism and Islam. Pran Nath

began a reformist movement in the eighteenth century called Pranami Sampraday to show that the ideals underlying Hinduism and Islam were the same and there were marked similarities between the philosophies embodied in the Koran and the Vedas; he wrote *Kulzum Sarup* in Gujarati to align aspects of the Upanishads with the Koran (see Malik 1990, 24; Malik 2010, 564–5).

(³⁶) See fn 24. Gandhi argued that ‘Hinduism is an elastic, undefinable term, and the Hindus are not a homogenous whole. ... In other words and in reality, so far as India is concerned, there can only be political parties and no majority or minority communities’ (*Hn* 21 October 1939). For Jawaharlal Nehru’s civilizational arguments for cultural unity based on composite culture, see Nehru 1941, 14–15 and Nehru 1946, 31–2, 35, 41–2, 52–4.

(³⁷) *YI* 30 April 1931, in Gandhi 1959, 53.

(³⁸) *YI* 25 September 1924. See also *YI* 2 September 1926 in Gandhi (1959, 238, cited earlier.

(³⁹) For a detailed account of last fast and the changes in many of Gandhi’s earlier positions, see Sangari (2002).

(⁴⁰) 7 February 1934, in Gandhi 1958–84, vol. 57, 110.

(⁴¹) *Hn* 6 March 1937, in Gandhi 1958–84, vol. 54, 401. See also *Hn* 28 November 1936, in Gandhi 1959, 231.

(⁴²) *Hn* 28 September 1947. He also came much closer to accepting Hinduism as a retrospective term than he had done before (*Hn* 30 November 1947, in Gandhi 1959, 229).

(⁴³) *YI* 25 September 1924.

(⁴⁴) ‘I can detect no inconsistency in declaring that I can, without in any way impairing the dignity of Hinduism pay equal homage to the best of Islam, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Judaism. Such Hinduism will live as long as the sun shines’ (*Hn* 30 November 1947). See also 21 November 1947, in Gandhi 1958–84, vol. 90, 79.

(⁴⁵) *Hn* 8 March 1947. Similar statements in *Hindustan* 8 September 1946, in Gandhi 1958–84, vol. 85, 276–7, and interview 17 July 1946 in Iyer 1987, vol. 1, 76 are cited earlier.

(⁴⁶) ‘It is because I am a Sanatani Hindu that I claim to be a Christian, a Buddhist and a Muslim’ (*Hn* 27 April 1947).

(⁴⁷) See, for instance, *Hn* 11 May 1947 in Gandhi 1959, 249.

(⁴⁸) For instance, having credited Christ with universality and humanity (*Hn* 6 March 1937, in Gandhi 1958–84, vol. 54, 397–8), he said Jesus belonged ‘not solely to Christianity, but to the entire world, to all races and peoples.’ (*Modern Review* October 1941, in Gandhi 1958–84, vol. 75, 70).

(⁴⁹) *Hn* 27 April 1947. Significantly, Gandhi was called a Buddhist, a ‘Christian Mohammedan’ and, pejoratively, ‘Mohammed Gandhi’. See, for instance, *Hn* 27 April 1947, in Gandhi 1959, 248.

(⁵⁰) *HS*, 63.

(⁵¹) *Hn* 2 February 1934, in Gandhi 1958–84, vol. 57, 89–90.

(⁵²) *Hn* 16 March 1947.

(⁵³) He believed that since ‘Truth’ was God, ‘there is nothing wrong with every man following Truth according to his lights’. There were many different faiths because the

Soul is one, but the bodies which She animates are many. We cannot reduce the number of bodies, yet we recognise the unity of the Soul. Even as a tree has a single trunk, but many branches and leaves, so there is one true and perfect Religion, but it becomes many as it passes through the human medium. The one Religion is beyond all speech. Imperfect men put it into such language as they can command, and their words are interpreted by other men equally imperfect. Whose interpretation is to be held the right one? Everybody is right from his own standpoint, but it is not impossible that everybody is wrong. ... True knowledge of religion breaks down the barrier between faith and faith. (Gandhi 1932 [1957], 3, 39–40)

(⁵⁴) *Hn* 5 October 1947.

(⁵⁵) Aligning the divine essence with human perception, al-‘Arabi had asked why a distinction is made between

it is all the Reality [and] it is all created? It is all created in a certain sense, but it is also the Reality in another sense, the Essence being one. After all, in essence, the form of a Self-manifestation and that of the one who perceives it are the same, for He is [at once] the Self-manifesting subject and the object of that manifestation. Consider then how wonderful is God in His Identity and in His relation to the Cosmos in the realities [inherent] in His Beautiful Names. (al-‘Arabi 1980, 150)

(⁵⁶)

Either one may say that God manifests Himself like that or that the Cosmos, being looked at and into, is like God in His Self-manifestation. It is various in the eye of the beholder according to the makeup of that beholder, or it is that the makeup of the beholder is various because of the variety of the manifestation. All this is possible with respect to the [divine] realities. (al-‘Arabi 1980, 211)

(⁵⁷) According to Austin, for al-‘Arabi,

since the Reality as God, the Supreme Name, transcends all its Names or aspects, the Heart of the ordinary man cannot see God or know God as such, but only the God of his creedal belief, which conforms to the Self-manifestation of ‘his Lord’ to him, which of course in turn conforms to what his own latent essence determines should be the content of his belief. In this way each man’s belief regarding the nature of God not only differs from the particular belief of other men, but is also, inevitably, but a minute facet of what God is in Himself. Each belief, determined as it is by essential predisposition, cannot be other than what God is, but neither, paradoxically, can it be wholly faithful to the divine Truth. It is only through the acquiring of gnosis that the Heart can be made receptive not only to the particular Lord, but also to the universality of ‘God’ and ultimately to the Reality Itself. (Austin 1980, 146)

(⁵⁸) See *YI* 18 May 1924, in Gandhi 1958–84, vol. 24, 86; *YI* 25 September 1924, in Gandhi 1958–84, vol. 25, 179; *YI* 5 March 1925, in Gandhi 1958–84, vol. 26, 224; *YI* 21 January 1926, in Gandhi 1958–84, vol. 29, 411–12; *YI* 6 August 1931, in Gandhi 1959, 146.

(⁵⁹) Letter, 10 June 1947, Gandhi 1958–84, vol. 88, 122; see also 22 July 1945, in Gandhi 1958–84, vol. 81, 454, and 27 October 1945, in Gandhi 1958–84, vol. 81, 462.

(⁶⁰) Then contemporary ‘conversions’—*shuddhi* and *tabligh*—attacked a syncretic field of religious practices through de-Islamicization and de-Hinduization. Conversion did not fit with Gandhi’s individualistic notion of worship and the only kind that he was willing to accept was one directed to ‘inward satisfaction and growth’, entirely private, emanating from individual belief and illumination alone—‘a matter of the heart purely and one between the Maker and oneself’ (*YI* 6 January 1927, 19 January 1928, and 29 May 1924; *Hn* 24 November 1946 and 12 January 1947). He rejected organized proselytism but was drawn to a premodern notion of individual conversion as a sudden revelation effected by the example of a preceptor whose perfection and engrossment in his own spiritual life spread its own silent illumination. See *Hn* 12 December 1936, in Gandhi 1958–84, vol. 54, 100.

(⁶¹) See Gandhi (1927 [1980], 276–7); *Hn* 6 April 1934, in Gandhi 1958–84, vol. 57, 353.

(⁶²) ‘My object is ever to make Muslims better Muslims, Hindus better Hindus, Christians better Christians, Parsis better Parsis. I never invite anybody to change his or her religion. I have thought, therefore, that the questioners will be glad to find that my religion is so expansive as to include readings from the religious scriptures of the whole world’ (*Hn* 23 February 1947). For a similar sentiment, see speech, 24 December 1947, in Gandhi 1958–84, vol. 90, 293.

(⁶³) See *Hn* 3 November 1946 and 27 April 1947.

(⁶⁴) Letter, 2 May 1933, in Nehru 1958, 113.

(⁶⁵) In the particular context and conjuncture of partition violence, his claim that all of this emanated from a true Sanatani Hinduism need not be taken literally but rather as a mode of instruction, persuasion, and exhortation. The ‘true Hindu’ simply *had* to belong to all religions:

The true Hindu sees Truth in every religion. The essence of the Koran verse is found in every religion. ... God is everywhere ... he only wants single-minded worship in whatsoever form and whatsoever language it be. It is, therefore, wholly un-Hindu and irreligious to object to the great verse from the Koran Sharif being recited. ... Even if I am killed I shall not give up repeating the names of Rama and Rahim, which means to me the same God. ... If I refrain from repeating the names of Rama and Rahim, how am I to face the Hindus of Noakhali and the Muslims of Bihar?’ (*Hn* 20 April 1947)

(⁶⁶) I have explored some of these in Sangari (2000).

(⁶⁷) The examples are numerous. For instance, Farquhar describes the small Chet Rami sect that persisted till at least the early decades of the twentieth century. It was founded by Chet Ram, a Vaishnav moneylender by birth, and disciple of an eclectic Chishti ascetic, Syed Mahbub Shah, who spoke frequently of Christ and had both Muslim and Hindu followers. On Shah’s death, after three years of passionate grief at his tomb, Chet Ram was ordered by Jesus in a vision to build a church. He did so, proclaimed Jesus as the lord, became a wandering teacher, and was persecuted by both the Hindus and Muslims. However, despite missionary overtures, he and his followers refused to join any Christian church. When he died in 1894, he was cremated but his bones were buried besides those of Mahbub Shah. He had appointed his daughter, pledged to celibacy, as his successor. The *khanquah* in Lahore preserved his relics, installed the Cross and the Bible, and distributed charms and amulets inscribed with the Chet Rami creed and the names of twelve apostles. In the sect’s doctrine of the Trinity, Allah was the Creator, Paramesvara the Preserver, and Khuda (Christ) the

Destroyer. There was no fixed form of worship, though the followers, mostly poor and illiterate Muslims and Hindus, were supposed to own Bibles, and saw Chet Ram as Christ himself (Farquhar 1967, 150–6).

⁽⁶⁸⁾ See 22 December 1947 in Gandhi 1958–84, vol. 90, 282; *Hn* 4 January and 8 February 1948; 25 and 27 January 1948 in Gandhi 1958–84, vol. 90, 493 and 507. At the level of popular worship, the festival of Urs was a sign of the cross-religious practices and beliefs, composite and syncretic traditions that had been censured or sought to be erased in preceding decades by the Hindu Mahasabha, RSS, and Muslim League as signs of the ‘corruption’ of Hinduism and Islam.

⁽⁶⁹⁾ *Hn* 13 March 1937, in Gandhi 1958–84, vol. 54, 420. He had expressed a similar sentiment in December 1924 (see Chatterjee 1983, 124).

⁽⁷⁰⁾ See *Hn* 2 June 1946, in Gandhi 1959, 120; *Hn* 22 June 1947, in Gandhi 1959, 131; *Hn* 29 June 1947, in Gandhi 1959, 116–18; *Hn* 28 April 1946, in Gandhi 1959, 119.

⁽⁷¹⁾ *Hn* 7 September 1947, in Gandhi 1959, 251; *Hn* 9 November 1947 and 25 January 1948.

⁽⁷²⁾ *Mahadev Desai’s Diary*, vol. 8, 281, cited in Chatterjee (1983, 52).

⁽⁷³⁾ *Hn* 25 January 1948.

⁽⁷⁴⁾ On varna and jati, see, for instance, *Hn* 4 March 1933, in Gandhi 1955, 141.

⁽⁷⁵⁾ Letter, 25 July 1918, in Gandhi 1958–84, vol. 14, 506; and 7 April 1926, in Gandhi 1958–84, vol. 32, 144.

⁽⁷⁶⁾ *Hn* 9 March 1940, in Gandhi 1958–84, vol. 71, 302.

⁽⁷⁷⁾ 17 April 1947, in Joshi 1988, 354.

⁽⁷⁸⁾ 16 March 1947, in Gandhi (1963 [1984], 29–30).

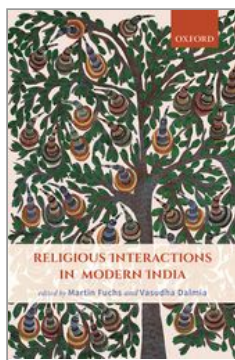
⁽⁷⁹⁾ *Hn* 11 March 1933 and 31 October 1936, in Gandhi 1959, 308 and 313.

⁽⁸⁰⁾ On the female devotional voice, see Sangari (1990).

⁽⁸¹⁾ Letter, 2 May 1933, in Nehru 1958, 113.

⁽⁸²⁾ *Hn* 7 July 1946, in Gandhi 1958–84, vol. 84, 388–9; see also *Hn* 12 April 1946, in Joshi 1988, 342.

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The Crucible of Peace

Pluralism and Community in Muslim Punjab

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter presents an example of successful religious coexistence, the case of the Punjabi princely state of Malerkotla, which between 1923 and 1940 encountered a series of disputes concerning the audibility of Hindu and Muslim rituals: the *arati-katha-namaz* disputes. It seems that no one died in Partition-related violence in Malerkotla, and a large majority of the local Muslim population remained there rather than migrate to Pakistan. The chapter discusses Malerkotla's complex history of conflict, going back to the state's foundation in the mid-fifteenth century. The agreement in 1940 between local Hindu and Muslim leaders that resolved the *arati-katha-namaz* conflict was not to interfere in future in the practices of the other community. In the aftermath, even while Malerkotla too experienced several cases of communal stress, a mode of disciplining dissent seems to have been in place that helped to avert major clashes between Hindus and Muslims.

Keywords: Malerkotla, Hindu and Muslim rituals, *arati-katha-namaz*, Partition-related violence, communal stress

Dawn and dusk in India is accompanied by a multitude of sounds emerging from temples, gurdwaras, mosques, and other sites. At certain times of the year, the public spaces—physical and aural—of many towns are occupied even more fully by the sights, sounds, and smells associated with the observation of holy days such as Muharram, Dussehra, Diwali, Navratri, Baqr 'Id, and the various Guru Purbs marking the Sikh gurus' birthdays. The heightened sensoria associated

with religious practice, whether mundane or festival in nature, engage not only the faithful celebrants but also those of other faiths and no faith in a collective experience. Yet the unavoidable awareness of other religions is not always welcome, making conflict and competition over a local soundscape a frequent factor in communal conflicts.

In the Punjabi princely state of Malerkotla, a series of disputes concerning the audibility of Hindu and Muslim rituals extended from 1923 to 1940. These disputes are particularly important to explore because they occurred shortly before the 1947 Partition in a town that became regionally famous for its harmonious communal relations. No one died in Partition-related violence in Malerkotla, and, alone among East Punjab communities, a large majority of the local **(p.275)** Muslim population remained in India rather than migrate to Pakistan. Examination of the available records of these conflicts reveals that the Malerkotla authorities, British officials, and the local population each had distinct understandings of what was at stake in the dispute. At root in these differences were variant conceptions of the ethical structure and moral basis of a religiously plural society. Ultimately, the local leaders sidestepped the State and the Raj in achieving resolution. This grassroots problem-solving may well have been critical in the establishment of Malerkotla's collective ethos of harmony, which not only survived Partition's challenges, but also proved invaluable as the community has confronted communal stressors on numerous occasions ever since (Bigelow 2010).

So what is at stake in a conflict over sacred sound? Why would the audibility of other people's rituals play any role at all in an inter-religious dispute? The answer to these questions for the British colonial officials was that the issue of sound was peripheral to 'real' issues—political representation, economic competition, or outside agitation, for example. The prescribed treatments were increased clarity in regulation and better-executed enforcement. For the Malerkotla ruler and his officers, the disputes over sacred sound were also more symptomatic than substantive, but the *darbar* (royal court) sought repeatedly to make the issue go away, by ignoring it and hoping to return to an idealized past practice from before the troubles. For the constituent population of citizens, sound expressions were on one level very much concerned with spiritual practice and the fulfilment of their duties to the divine. But these practices and duties were also taking place in a rapidly changing and expanding socio-political context where core religious sensibilities were newly available for alliance with the political. Though Malerkotla was a princely state and political mobilization was highly constrained and actively discouraged, it was also a British protectorate and as such could not be isolated entirely from India's upheaval in the first half of the twentieth century. Religious groups were allowed to organize, but those linked to movements in the country at large were discouraged and at certain moments even outlawed.¹ In relation to the use of sound in religious **(p.276)** ceremonies, the heat of the conflict arises in part

because this was an arena in which citizens could publicly debate their relative positions in the polity and assert their interests and needs. But sacred sound is also a key element in the making of what Charles Hirschkind calls a 'moral physiognomy', that is, a way of training the self to be literate in the ethical responses required by the various sense stimuli of a religious tradition (Hirschkind 2001, 628). Yet in a plural context, one is never informed solely by the sensory repertoire of one's own religion alone. Determining the appropriate moral response to the other is, in fact, where the ethics of collective life are worked out. Because the conflict over sacred sound is central to both spiritual self-fashioning and collective belonging, it mattered a great deal that in the Malerkotla *arati-katha-namaz* disputes of 1923–40, the citizens ultimately resolved the issue themselves.²

This is important because peaceful plural communities are not born; they are made. The making of a stable multi-religious society requires sustained work over time by a range of actors operating on multiple levels as individuals, families, associations, groups, neighbourhoods, clans, and collectivities. Malerkotla is such a place where, in spite of myriad stressors both past and present, the diverse residents are able to tap into local resources to maintain an overall harmonious collective dynamic and a remarkably well-integrated network of relationships at all levels of society. Known in today's media as the place 'where peace reigns supreme' (*The Tribune*, 2006), Malerkotla is the only remaining Muslim majority town in Indian Punjab. It is well known for having successfully navigated the devastation of Partition in 1947. But in spite of its pacific reputation, this former princely state actually does have a complex history of conflict going back to its foundation in the mid-fifteenth century as the spiritual territory of the Sufi Shaykh Sadruddin Sadri Jahan (d. 1505). There have been wars between this Muslim kingdom and its Sikh and Hindu neighbouring states, conflicts with the regional powers of the Sikh gurus and Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780–1839), and a few conflicts with more overt religious implications, such as the 1872 attack on the (p.277) town by a group of Namdhari Sikhs, in part over the question of cow slaughter.³ Yet in this town, particularly since 1947, inter-religious conflicts have also been used as opportunities to strengthen collective ties and to reassert the town's ethos of communal harmony. Partition itself, somewhat paradoxically, served as a kind of crucible in which the elements of the town's past that supported a sustainable plural society were distilled and the more toxic histories were burned away. By examining this period in local history just prior to Partition and its legacy in the present, we can see how the competition between differing notions of how to organize a religiously plural society in this case resulted in establishing a dominant framework for managing interreligious conflict that continues to this day.

The British Raj and the Malerkotla darbar were not wrong in their view that communal conflict is rarely just about religion. Numerous other social, economic, and political factors are usually involved. Yet religion, particularly public religion, provides a network of meaning and a set of symbols through which conflict is expressed, enacted, and experienced. Conflict also shapes the way religious people orient and organize themselves spiritually and in other ways. Conflicts over the public symbols of religion, therefore, are often the arenas in which other issues are worked out. In some communities, systematic discrimination against an ethnic group, caste, or religion is observable in terms of differentials in employment, economic and social status, and demographic indicators such as rates of literacy, infant mortality, and gender equity. Religious difference in terms of beliefs, practices, and identities is only one element, but, depending on the circumstances, may provide one of the more available networks through which to communicate within and between social groups. This was certainly the case in Malerkotla. In the period of the princely state (1454–1948), Malerkotla's ruling family was Pathan Muslim since the state's founding by their progenitor, the Sufi saint, Shaykh Sadruddin (p.278) Sadri Jahan. Along with the lineage of descendants who are caretakers of the saint's shrine, the shaykh's heirs have dominated local politics until quite recently. At least since the 1941 census, the population of Malerkotla has been majority Muslim as well.⁴ Political organization of any kind under the nawabs' rule was not permitted, but religious groups had a fair amount of freedom. Indeed, the nawabs appear to have been at pains to demonstrate support for their non-Muslim citizens by building gurdwaras and patronizing local temples. Yet inequality is endemic in a hereditary princely state and it is clear that non-Muslims, as well as Muslims from the non-dominant clans, did not have the same property or political rights as the ruling Pathans.

Communal Context: Praja Mandal, Finance, and Independence

In the early part of the twentieth century, when the arati-katha-namaz conflict arose, these inequalities were being channelled in several ways, providing important context for the sonic dissonance debate. One such channel was the Riyasati Praja Mandal movement for land rights within a princely state (*riyasat*) (Walia 1972). Throughout India, the 1920s and 1930s were times of increasing tensions on a range of fronts. The independence movement against British rule was becoming stronger, and consequently there were more and more clashes between freedom fighters and the British forces. As the movement gained traction, in many places communal strife also flared, as Hindu and Muslim organizations mobilized their constituencies to secure their own goals and agendas. In the princely states, activists also sought to end autocratic rule and increase their land rights, economic opportunities, and political representation. In Punjab, this was known as the Praja Mandal movement. Malerkotla experienced these tensions as well. The local chapter of the Praja Mandal was made up of Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims, who held demonstrations in Malerkotla,

published anti-royal literature, and networked with other chapters.⁵ In one incident in 1927, there was a police firing, in which **(p.279)** fourteen people were shot and one killed by the forces of Nawab Ahmad Ali Khan (d. 1947). This sparked further demonstrations against the ruler, eventually forcing the nawab to discipline the police superintendent.⁶ It is evident that the movement remained of some concern to officials as state records afterwards took note of whether there had been any activity in the kingdom to mark the anniversary of the incident.

Unrest in Malerkotla was also fed in part by the financial mismanagement of the rulers. Several files in the India Office collection in the British Library speak to the enormous debt of Malerkotla to the British, to other princely states, and to bankers and moneylenders in Malerkotla itself. These include such gems as *Debt of Malerkotla to Calcutta Firms* and *Irregularities of Nawab Re: Payment of Debt*.⁷ Of the ruling family's local debt, a substantial portion appears to have been owed to Hindu citizens. For example, a document from a report on service by Malerkotla state during World War I listed the names of Malerkotla bankers serving on the War Loan Committee (Hussain 1920, 21). Three of the four listed were Hindu, indicating the prominent role in local finance played by this community. As it relates to the conflict over arati-katha-namaz, the debt to local Hindu moneylenders led to a perception in some quarters that the nawab was biased against his fellow Muslims in favour of the Hindus, to whom he owed money.

Outside of Malerkotla, the independence movement was causing great consternation in British circles, including the somewhat **(p.280)** protected princely states. The first non-cooperation movement was launched in the early 1920s by Gandhi and the Congress party, but was called off in early 1922 following violence at Chauri Chaura, which resulted in the death of twenty-one police officers. The non-violent protest of Gandhi's Salt March in 1930 highlighted the power of mass non-violent activism and the importance of national groups to represent popular interests. Contemporaneously with the arati-katha-namaz issue, the Government of India Act in 1935 created communally based electorates in an effort to appease some of the fervour for independence. Although clearly these electorates were not immediately relevant to citizens of a princely state, the principle of political organization on religious grounds was becoming increasingly institutionalized. The Malerkotla and British archives reveal that these authorities were quite concerned that political groups, such as the Congress and Ahrar parties, and religious ones, such as the Hindu Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) or the various Muslim Anjumans (Muslim welfare and political groups often organized around particular issues), not take root in Malerkotla. As we will see, regarding the ongoing arati-katha-namaz issue, British officials repeatedly voiced their concern that the conflict was driven, all or in part, by such influences from outside the state.

Arati-Katha-Namaz: Hindu-Muslim Ritual Conflict

During the first half of the twentieth century, tensions between Hindus and Muslims in Malerkotla flared up on several occasions. In the intertwined cases of the arati-katha-namaz dispute, the issues concerned the control of the soundscape of two neighbourhoods. In the first incident in 1923, a Shiva temple, called the Chaudrian Mandir (as it was owned by local Chaudrys), and an adjacent mosque, known as the Masjid Bafindigan or Weaver's Mosque, began to dispute over the timing of evening prayers in both spaces. The Muslims claimed that traditionally their evening namaz had occurred before the beginning of evening devotions at the adjoining temple. The Hindus claimed they had always performed arati (the offerings of light and sound to the deities) simultaneously with the evening namaz, and an agitation ensued. All parties in later documents are reported as saying that the issue was resolved by a return to established past practice. The trouble was that in 1935, when the issue arose again, no one agreed on what **(p.281)** that past practice had been. The Hindu claimants argued that arati and namaz had always been simultaneous and based this in part on the fact that the temple was much older than the mosque. The Muslim claimants argued that arati had always begun after namaz. The Indian Civil Service (ICS) officer J.C. Donaldson, who was appointed by the nawab in 1935 to investigate the case, found the Muslim case more convincing. He based his judgment in part on the principle that it would have been strange for one mosque to have evening prayers some twenty minutes later than every other mosque in town in order to accommodate the sounds of arati, which he determined were clearly audible in the prayer space. But what had actually been agreed upon in 1923 seemed to be entirely a matter of perspective. According to Malerkotla state records and the British India Office files, no official reports on the earlier conflict exist—a matter of some consternation and disappointment to the British officials as will be discussed later.

The issue between the Chaudrian Mandir and the Masjid Bafindigan flared up again in June of 1935, following a separate clash over sacred sound near the main bazaar. This second issue arose over a Ramayan *katha* (the recitation of the epic Ramayana), which typically takes place over many evenings. The *katha* was held on a rooftop that overlooked the Masjid Loharan (Ironworker's Mosque), which was affiliated with the Ahl-e Hadith, an extremely conservative movement within Islam, and a group to whom prayer disturbance of any kind would likely be especially galling. Indeed, as the British officer J.C. Donaldson pointed out, in his estimation the choice of location for the *katha* was quite likely intentionally provocative. As the *katha* issue developed, the Chaudrian Mandir and Masjid Bafindigan dispute re-emerged, with both parties claiming that established practice from the 1923 incident accorded with their version of the story. Malerkotla officials attempted to control the situation by banning religious observations of both *katha* and namaz in the neighbourhood and decreed that, once resumed, arati should begin twenty minutes following namaz. These

actions were not well received and several demonstrations ensued, speeches were made, and protests held. On 21 October 1935, one day after the state authorities proposed to suspend all katha and namaz in the neighbourhood for several days in order to pursue a resolution to the dispute, Puran Mal, one of the leaders of the Hindu community involved in the conflict, was fatally **(p.282)** wounded in a street clash. According to the state records, four Muslim youths were arrested and eventually two were executed.⁸

Following these events, there was a period of five years during which, according to newspaper reports and state documents, no arati or katha appears to have taken place in any of the local Hindu temples. Eventually, on 20 September 1940, an agreement between local Hindu and Muslim leaders brought an end to the suspension. The five-year temple strike (*hartal*) is often discussed in both state and colonial files, appearing in various reports, newspaper clippings, and communiqués. This period was punctuated by occasional demonstrations, pamphlet publications (to which references are made, but none exist in the archives), and speech making by internal and external partisans. For example, in September of 1936, some thousand or so Muslims left Malerkotla, led by the State Mufti, on what they called a *hijra*, or migration, in protest over perceived bias on the part of the Muslim rulers in favour of the Hindu community. The frustration was due to the execution of two Muslims following the riot that killed Puran Mal and the failure to prosecute anyone for the mysterious death of a Muslim girl found buried on a Hindu family's property. Meanwhile, according to fortnightly reports in the colonial archives, a perceived delay in prosecuting Puran Mal's death led to 'some renewal of complaints from the Hindu community of the Darbar's communal bias'. In short, there appears to be simmering grievance on all sides, but as far as the available records show, no additional violence during the period from 1935 to 1940, when the issue was eventually resolved. The documentary evidence grows thinner as time progresses, leaving an even foggier view of this tangled series of cases.

Motivations and Machinations: Behind the Arati-Katha-Namaz Dispute
The backdrop of the growing independence movement, the rise of communal parties and advocacy groups, and the lead up to World War II were also factors in the conflicts. This last issue in particular begins to appear in letters in the Malerkotla chief minister's file, as **(p.283)** state officials, colonial officers, and some of the complainants in the arati-katha-namaz dispute all appeal to the collective need to pull together in the face of this new challenge. For example, in a letter dated 28 August 1940 from Mohanlal Sharma, the secretary of the Malerkotla Hindu Sabha, to the Resident of the Punjab states, Sharma points out:

We have contributed more than eight times in the present war fund than the Mohammadans, and we would have contributed much more had this communal deadlock ended so that we as representatives of our community

could have pressed our coreligionists to contribute more than what they had really offered at the present.⁹

Though the phrasing appears intended to press for favourable treatment of the Hindus in return for much-needed financial support for the war effort, it also indicates an awareness that the attention of the nation has shifted and the onset of war has changed the dynamic of a dispute that could appear quite petty by comparison.

Another element of the conflict is the possibility that the entire affair was a deliberate provocation by a small group of local Hindus connected to the Chaudrian temple and the sponsors of the *katha*. According to the reports, the *katha* was initiated at the behest of one Peshawri Mal, who happened also to be connected to the Chaudrian temple from the 1923 dispute. Certainly this appears more than coincidental to the keepers of the records, who do not appear to give much weight to Peshawri Mal and his cohort. Donaldson observes in his report to the nawab that Mal ‘undoubtedly selected a site which it was possible might give rise to objection from the worshippers in the mosque. The question whether he did so inadvertently or maliciously depends on the estimate which one forms of his character and that of his supporters’. He goes on to point out that Mal said he ‘paid no attention whatever during the performance of the *katha* or when arranging it to the times of Muslim prayer. Considering the situation which he chose, within earshot of the mosque, this statement gives some indication of his point of view and character’.¹⁰ Donaldson clearly has a dim estimation of Peshawri Mal, though he is not much more impressed by any of the other complainants in the case. For **(p.284)** example, regarding the contradictions in evidence given by the imam of the Weaver’s Mosque and the pujari of the Chaudrian Mandir, he observed: ‘It is rather distressing that it should be possible for the whole peace of the town to be disturbed by a dispute between two little hedge-priests of this type and their congregations.’¹¹ However, by 21 September 1935, when this report was submitted, the conflict had clearly gone far beyond these ‘hedge-priests’ alone.

The most pressing concern of the British officials, and to a certain extent for the darbar as well, was the possibility that the arati-*katha*-namaz issue was not local in origin, but driven by the communalist and nationalist activists, who were operating in British India. The records frequently note the presence of outside agitators and see them as essentially seeking to gin up local conflict. To a certain degree, it appears their concerns were justified, particularly in regards to the principal Hindu actors in the controversy. Numerous letters from the local Hindu sabha, clippings from partisan newspapers (such as *The National Call*), and a declaration from a regional Mahabir Dal (a Hindu activist organization), all testify to efforts by local Hindu leaders to tie their grievance over the timing of arati and the ban on *katha* during the disturbances to the broader concerns of Hindus in India. At the Punjab Frontier Provincial Mahabir Dal Conference in

Rawalpindi, held on 28–30 June 1940, resolution number 4 critiques Malerkotla and its handling of the conflict saying,

This conference regrets to observe that the State has been ignoring the peaceful and continuous protest of the Hindus for full five years and now when the Hindus and the Muslims of the State are willing to patch up their differences by mutual goodwill the State officials are throwing obstacles in their way, although it was morally urgent upon them to have used their influence to bring about harmony and peace among their peoples.¹²

Most interesting, given the discussion of the ethical framework in which the management of the dispute is cast by all the parties, is the way in which the creation of ‘harmony and peace’ is presented as the moral duty of the state. But the Mahabir Dal also calls out the ‘Sanatanists’ for their ‘negligence’ of the matter, which they see as **(p.285)** a cause of ignominy. In their statement, the Mahabir Dal criticized certain Hindus (Sanatanists, followers of what is considered *sanatan dharma*—eternal religion) for not recognizing that the issue confronting their fellow Hindus in Malerkotla would not be redressed unless regional and national Hindu organizations got involved. Even during the principle investigation of 1935, the ICS officer Donaldson remarked that although he had no direct proof of the matter, ‘there is a suspicion left on my mind that Peshawri Mal was acting under some influence which desired to provoke trouble in the State and which may have come either from within or from without the State’.¹³ The colonial concern with the source of the agitation, particularly if it connected with groups linked to the independence movement, is not only apparent in their suspicions of external involvement. In Donaldson’s report, for example, the emergence of the conflict is also tied to a failure on the part of local authorities to introduce the proper policies, such as those employed by the British in the territories under direct rule.

Malerkotla’s rulers had allied with the British in 1809 in order to offset the threat of being swallowed by the territories loyal to Maharaja Ranjit Singh (d. 1839), who united much of Punjab in the early nineteenth century into a Sikh kingdom. One of the few Muslim ruled principalities in southeast Punjab, Malerkotla saw its future as allied with the British. From 1809 to the dissolution of princely states in 1948, the British were deeply involved in the governance of Malerkotla. British officers were posted as advisors to the darbar, including at least twice as superintendents, when nawabs Ibrahim Ali Khan and Ahmad Ali Khan were still minors.¹⁴ Many members of the royal family were educated in British schools, awarded imperial honours, and invited to functions held by the British Raj in Delhi and beyond. The state and British archival records on the arati-katha-namaz dispute both indicate a concern on the part of the darbar with how the events would be perceived by the colonial authorities. **(p.286)** There are repeated requests for information from the secretary to the Punjab States Agent. There is the ICS officer J.C. Donaldson’s investigation and report.

There are also numerous fortnightly reports and other communiqués between state and colonial officials regarding the matter. The efforts of Malerkotla's leaders to please the British Raj at times border on the sycophantic. In a report commissioned by the Nawab Ahmad Ali Khan in the aftermath of World War I, the author Ijaz Hussain opens the document by reminding the reader: 'In 1809 the State formally entered into political relations with the British Government and has ever since rendered valuable loyal assistance at every possible emergency' (1920, i). Hussain also praises the nawab profusely for his administration of the state and leadership in war: 'The credit for all these achievements is really due to the wise, sagacious and wide awake Ruler of the State ... who in keeping with the great loyalty and devotion to the Person and Throne of His Imperial Majesty which characterizes his House, spared himself no trouble and pain and ungrudgingly offered his very best during the Great War' (Hussain 1920, ii). This is followed by a list of campaigns from the Gurkha War of 1814 to the mutiny of 1857 to World War I, in which Malerkotla troops were deployed on behalf of the 'suzerain power', that is, Britain.

This affinity for British rule is not, however, indicative of an affinity for British practices of governance. Looking at how the Malerkotla leadership managed the arati-katha-namaz issue, there is quite a bit of criticism for the way the nawab and his ministers handled the problem. Donaldson, for example, notes that one of the chief frustrations in determining the proper course of action following the 1935 iteration of the Chaudrian Mandir and Masjid Bafindigan conflict is that nowhere was the resolution of the 1923 episode codified, and nowhere in the laws of the state was there clear guidance as to how to manage the issue of ritual simultaneity.

At present there is no regulation existing by which persons proposing to give noisy entertainments or musical performances in public, within the city limits, have to obtain previous permission from any authority. This is a customary rule in municipalities in British India, and I recommend that some such provision should be introduced to have effect within Malerkotla town. It should apply to all activities of an occasional nature which are accompanied by music of any kind and which are to **(p.287)** take place in public places or in the open air within earshot of a public street. The authorities will then have timely warning of any proceeding which is likely to give rise to a dispute and can make their preparations accordingly.¹⁵

This passage is quite revealing of colonial attitudes towards public gatherings, particularly noisy or musical ones. Inasmuch as such events have the potential to give rise to disputes, they must be treated as potential public disturbances. Requiring citizens to seek permission affords officials the opportunity to prepare and reveals a priority on public order as the appropriate means of establishing a peaceful community. Nowhere in the document does Donaldson suggest that consultations or committees that would bring locals together would be helpful.

Indeed, given his dismissive opinion of the 'hedge-priests', such conversations would likely be unproductive. The establishment of good order is the priority, not the development of an integrated citizenry.

Three Views of the Conflict: Order, Legitimacy, and an Ethos of Brotherhood

In his report, Donaldson went on to point out that the absence of documentation of previous disputes was 'perhaps rather irregular, if no record of what had occurred was prepared by the officials concerned. But it cannot always be assumed that everybody will act in all circumstances exactly according to the correct routine'. Implicit in Donaldson's assertion that there *is* a correct routine and in his judgment this was not observed in the handling of the 1923 case. Correctness in this regard would involve regulations, permits, and clear rules about how to manage the use of public spaces—both territorial and aural. He does, however, acknowledge that the local officers may have had good reason for neither keeping records on the matter nor establishing a general rule for the disposition of such situations. The reasons for not making a record and establishing a rule—though clearly superior methods for maintaining the peace long term—include the understandable desire to minimize the importance of **(p. 288)** the event and avoid raising the stakes. Still, the absence of a public record gave credence to the suspicion in some Hindu quarters that documents favouring the Hindu perspective that arati and namaz had occurred simultaneously were intentionally suppressed or destroyed. Donaldson observed that without materials to counter that scenario, which he himself discredits, the rumour's potency is more difficult to dilute.

Donaldson's approach to communal conflicts involving ritual sound management is not an idiosyncratic one for the British officials in India during this period. Included in one of the India Office files about the arati-katha-namaz issue was an essay titled 'Communal Disorders', written in approximately 1928 by an unnamed British government official. The essay surveys Hindu-Muslim disturbances from 1923 to 1928, noting that there was a significant uptick in communal violence in the aftermath of the failed alliance between 'Mr. Gandhi's' independence movement and the Khilafat movement that sought to restore the Ottoman Caliphate following World War I. This indicates the author's perception that there was a correlation between a rise in communal conflict and the end of a political alliance intended to improve Hindu-Muslim relations. The author asserts that the causes of these conflicts, in his estimation, were rarely religious, but religious practices often served as triggers for communal disorder. 'Both the Hindu and the Muslim systems are based upon rigid religious sanctions and for that reason the proximate occasion of communal disorder is almost always, in some one of its protean forms, the religious issue.'¹⁶ The author notes that several such triggers were most common: the convergence of holy days (made inevitable by the differing calendar systems of the Muslim lunar year and the Hindu combinatory lunar-solar year); Hindu objections to cow slaughter, most

commonly around the Muslim observation of 'Id al-Adha (Baqr 'Id); and the playing of music before mosques. In regard to this last issue, the author argues that though the problem is perennial, it had only begun to trigger violence on a regular basis since 1923 and the end of the Khilafat–Congress alliance. In the cases of music-related disputes between Hindus and Muslim noted in the (p. 289) report, the view of the essayist is that, given the inevitability of music being audible during Muslim prayer times, the sounds themselves are not the problem: 'Every Hindu marriage necessitates a procession from the house of the bridegroom to that of the bride, with musicians and a cortege. Thus if feelings are sore on the subject of the playing of music before mosques, the occasions when communal trouble may be apprehended are almost indefinitely multiplied'.¹⁷ The issue of why feelings might be sore about music is essentially unexplored in the document as the author also asserts: 'Much of the dissension which occurs frequently arises less from what is done in the name of religious requirement than from the manner in which it is done or is alleged to be done.'¹⁸ Intention to offend, or the perceived intention, is presented as the spark that ignites a conflict.

The somewhat contradictory assessments that Hinduism and Islam (and therefore all Hindus and Muslims) are based on 'rigid religious sanctions', and that communal disputes are less about religion than about attitudes and comportment in regard to those of other faiths, are recurring features in much colonial writing on religion. Even as Donaldson and the anonymous author of 'Communal Disorders both' seem convinced that the root issue is not religious or about sacred sounds, they are also often prone to passing judgments on the doctrinal necessity of performing arati at a particular time or the possibility of praying the *maghrib* (evening) namaz at a time somewhat later than the call to prayer. It is a bit puzzling that on the one hand the dictates of religion are both rigid and of central importance in a dispute, but at the same time the issue at hand has no religious substance in the eyes of the colonial authorities. The implication seems to be that the complainants are both religious reactionaries and extremely petty, requiring an ordering state to manage and mitigate the tensions.

However, the anonymous author also argues that riots may occur with little or no provocation: 'If explosive material has been stored up, a spark will ignite it; if communal feelings are strained, the smallest pretext will suffice to start a conflagration which each side accuses (p.290) the other of having provoked.'¹⁹ Intensified religious sensibilities may converge with a range of grievances, some religious, some political, some overt, some suppressed. As Beth Roy points out in her study of communal conflict in Bengal, religiously defined interest groups may have appeared 'all the more attractive as forces for change because other possible structures were lacking' as avenues for mobilization and activism (Roy 1994, 165). To an extent, this was true in Malerkotla. As discussed previously, a host of challenges were facing the kingdom, from the Praja Mandal movement to

financial debt to the growing influence of communally based activism. Even if the darbar could outlaw political organizations, it was disinclined to ban religious groups and risk offending large segments of the population. Still, Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh groups were all monitored, as revealed by various files in state and British archives.²⁰ Maintaining public order was the chief concern of the British and the darbar. The ethical premise of both regimes was based on their ability to govern, to instil shared values of civic order in the populace, and to validate their own authority through the smooth running of their territories.

Nawab Ahmad Ali Khan and the officials in the state, especially Chief Minister Jamil Khan, shared many of these priorities, but seemingly few of the administrative skills necessary to implement policies that would realize them. In debt to, and dependent upon both the British and the population for their continued existence, the nawab vacillated between authoritarian crackdowns, as with the Kothala **(p.291)** firings against the Praja Mandal activists, and fear of the populace. Their main goal seems to have been the perpetuation of the regime by any means necessary, whether through authoritarianism, pandering, or inaction. From the available records, it appears that the nawab spent much of his time during the arati-katha-namaz crises in Simla, the summer capital of the Raj. As one fortnightly report put it,

The behaviour of His Highness the Nawab of Malerkotla during the recent troubles in his state cannot be passed over without mention. He changed orders when pressed by relatives, showed abject fear of his subjects and after releasing the arrested disturbers of the peace fled on the excuse of ill health to Simla when a Muhammadan demonstration was made at the palace at Malerkotla.²¹

This is indicative of a sovereign, who is hoping that the problem will go away, whether because someone else (his ministers, the British, the people) solved it or because it simply ceased to be an issue. The rest of the darbar was similarly reluctant to act. Several of the chief minister's letters to the Secretary to the Resident of the Punjab States indicated a desire to put off implementing any of the policy recommendations regarding the management of sacred sound in public spaces in the hopes that the issue would blow over. This ostrich-like attitude is evident, for example, in a letter reporting on the situation to Secretary E.B. Wakefield dated 19 October 1937. Chief Minister Jamil Khan writes,

On my return from Simla I called a gathering of both the communities and addressed them on the subject. It had a good effect and seems to have brought the communities closer to each other. They are trying to evolve a formula acceptable to both but so far a stage has not yet reached. All my efforts are directed to create the necessary atmosphere for that purpose but any hasty action or direct interference on the part of the authorities in

such matters does not, at present, seem to be advisable lest some communally minded persons might utilize the occasion for creating excitement and reviving old associations.²²

The sentiments expressed by the chief minister (who had also been in Simla instead of Malerkotla) are not without merit; however **(p.292)** how an action could be characterized as 'hasty' over two years after the start of the conflict and a full three years before its eventual resolution, is difficult to understand. Furthermore, a similar desire to simply let matters run their course and essentially do nothing is expressed in several other communiqués in the same file. Indeed the very last page of the file is a letter dated 9 February 1941 to the secretary to the Resident, Punjab States, Major Woods-Ballard, from the chief minister, following up on the situation after resolution was achieved by the complainants in September the previous year. In the letter, Khan notes that since much of the tension has blown over, it would perhaps be time to formally cancel the darbar's order from 1935 that had set the time for arati in the Chaudrian Mandir to begin twenty minutes after namaz in the Masjid Bafindagan. As he puts it, 'The time now appears to be ripe for it, but it would be preferable to wait for some time more till the memory of the past unhappy events is completely obliterated from the people's minds.'²³ Wait and see, defer to the British, and maintain public order at all costs seem to be the operative approaches by Malerkotla state officials to the seventeen-year disturbance.

The eventual resolution of the arati-namaz-katha issue is hard to flesh out from the available records, but the Malerkotla chief minister's file on the conflict does have a few documents from 1940 that give a sense of the matter. Several of these are correspondence from Major Woods-Ballard. These letters indicate a certain amount of pressure from the British colonial officials to resolve the perennial problem, and often include forwarded letters from the Malerkotla Hindu Sabha, who repeatedly sought British support in pressing the nawab Ahmad Ali Khan. As discussed previously, there is ample evidence elsewhere in the files that the state had not handled the situation adequately. Nawab Ahmad Ali Khan and his government were accused by turns of favouring one community or the other—the Muslims, as his co-religionists, or the Hindus, as he was afraid of them and in their financial debt. In spite of clear evidence of mismanagement, both fiscally and in relation to this intertwined series of communal conflicts, **(p. 293)** the nawab's good governance is often cited by Malerkotla residents as the reason for the town's positive inter-religious relations today and as the reason why the Muslim population remained in India after Partition in 1947. In the early 1990s, a local historian, Anila Sultana, asked residents, why they or their families remained in Malerkotla when so many Punjabi Muslims migrated to Pakistan. Among the reasons cited, a plurality of respondents claimed that their allegiance to the nawab was their main reason for staying (Sultana 1993, 78). Though Ahmad Ali Khan died in 1947 and his son Iftikhar Ali Khan was functionally the ruler of the state during the period of Partition, the fact is worth

noting that the role of the ruling family was seen in a positive light by many citizens just seven years after the resolution of the arati-katha-namaz controversy, in spite of their having shown little leadership during the crisis.

However, the chief minister's records indicate that to a great extent it was the persistence of the local leaders in engaging in negotiations over the course of the five-year strike in the temples that ultimately bore fruit. In particular, over the summer of 1940, at least two documents appear to have circulated: one was a draft proposal from the Hindu community, the other a copy of an agreement reached by Hindus and Muslims in Agra in 1934 regarding a similar conflict. The Hindu draft is much more detailed than the Agra agreement, revealing both their perspective on the nature of the grievance and the ethical implications of a resolution in accord with their hoped-for outcome.

We both the Hindus and Mohammadans of Malerkotla fully realize the sorrowful effects of that decision by which a ban of twenty minutes was placed on the performance of Arti in the Temple Chaudhrian and the saying of evening prayer in the Mosque Bafindgan. We with our free will compromise, as members of one brotherhood and in spirit of toleration and goodwill that both the Hindus and Mohammadans have equal rights to perform their Arti and say their prayer and to place any limitations on the Arti and prayer is improper. We also promise that both the communities will perform their religious duties in the temple and mosque without creating any disturbance in the other and this we have done placing full trust and goodwill in the other.²⁴

(p.294) In articulating a draft resolution, the Hindu authors of this paragraph are both critiquing the State and also imagining an ideal society—one based on brotherhood, toleration, and goodwill. It is also a polity grounded on the recognition of equal rights to worship. The agreement recognizes that trust is the key element upon which any resolution must rest.

The Agra agreement, on the other hand, is terse, involving much less in the way of moralizing about the nature of the agreement and its signatories. The body of the text reads simply: 'We the Hindus and Moslems of Agra have composed our differences and will perform our customary worship and prayers according to our established and recognized usages in our temples and mosques with our mutual goodwill and without interference from either side.'²⁵ The reference to mutual goodwill is the only indication that bringing an end to the Agra conflict was perceived as an ethical good. Non-interference is the primary policy asserted to achieve that end. It is a minimalist statement that gives no indication of why any deviation from customary worship had occurred or why custom had for some period been locally controversial.

In Malerkotla, the final agreement signed on 20 September 1940 is at once simpler, clearer, and less partisan than the proposed Hindu draft, and more concerned with the ethical import of the agreement than is the Agra accord.

We the Hindus and Muslims of Malerkotla are not satisfied with the orders of the Darbar dated the 9th October, 1935, regarding the dispute about the coincidence of the times of Katha in Moti Bazar, Arti in Chaudrian Temple and Namaz in Weavers' Mosque. With a view to restore our unity and cordial relations, we by mutual consideration have come to the understanding that the Hindus will not by their conduct in performing their Katha and Arti give any occasion which may be likely to create interference in the Namaz, and Muslims in view of the above assurance, will not interfere in the performance of Arti and Katha.²⁶

From the perspective of conflict-resolution analysis, it is interesting that to a great extent the religious leaders themselves sorted out **(p.295)** the issue, in objection to and countering the proposal of the darbar. Indeed, the agreement opens with a collective rejection of the state's previous order that required arati to follow the call to prayer for evening namaz by twenty minutes. In contrast to the common perception that Malerkotla's harmonious communal relations during Partition and up to this day are connected to the good governance of the nawabs, it appears that the people themselves were the architects of their own resolution. Through a wide range of social actions—marches, demonstrations, speeches, pamphlets, and strikes—the various parties sought redress from the state and recognition from one another in the grievance. Ultimately, however, whether through exhaustion from the five-year duration of the strike on arati, realization that World War II was going to soon overshadow all state and colonial concerns, or through authentic desire to live more happily with one another, a select group of thirty-eight residents signed the above-mentioned resolution.

Also interesting about the final accord is the manner in which it constructs an ideal ethical code for managing the audition of worship in inter-religious contexts. The stated motivation of the agreement is the desire to 'restore our unity and cordial relations'. Although the Hindu draft had emphasized the right to worship freely and addressed the grievance of having had a postponement of worship mandated by the state, the final accord does not include language concerning rights. Rather, it emphasizes 'mutual consideration' as the proper principle upon which to base a just resolution. Without a draft from any faction within the Muslim community to assess, it is only speculation to suggest that the change in language resulted from their critiques of the Hindu draft that otherwise bears much resemblance to the eventual resolution. The final statement regards non-interference as paramount in the behaviour of both groups. But this non-interference requires mutual awareness and attention to the religious other; that is Hindus must be cognizant of the timing and duration of namaz, Muslims must be aware of the timing and duration of arati and katha.

In both communities, the definition of prayer timings is signalled audibly through the ringing of bells and singing for Hindus and with the *azan*, or call to prayer, for Muslims.

Ultimately, only the local population understood what the conflict was really about. While the conflict over sound and religious identity (**p.296**) was seen as symptomatic of other grievances by the British and as threatening to their legitimacy by the *darbar*, the stakeholders in the resolution took the opportunity to assert their rights and to determine their own place in the collective landscape of Malerkotla. The sounds produced by required and predictable religious practices also express ethical values concerning the shape of group life. Clearly the antagonists had resentment towards one another for the offenses, whether real or perceived, concerning sound and proximate performance. They were also exerting authority in the one arena in which some autonomy was reliably available. Furthermore, the general rejection of the solution proposed and decreed by the British and the *darbar* gave shape to a civic forum for the working out of conflicts. But the question remains why sound should have been so pivotal in this persistent dispute.

Dissonance and Grievance

In the *arati-katha-namaz* conflict, the confluence of grievances effectively combined, so that the competition for dominance of the spiritual soundscape was tied to perceived imbalances of control over other shared arenas of civic life, such as the political, economic, social, or religious spheres, increasing the possibility that violence could occur. Thus, when events come to resonate with the felt experience of the parties involved in the conflict and are interpreted in such a way as to require action, the possibility for conflict increases. Triggering events alone do not produce social conflict—they happen far too often. It is the confluence of event, experience, and opportunity that feeds the flame. In some cases, the confluence is evident to multiple actors across a wide swath of society. In other instances, mobilized activists must make the case for the event to be understood as relating to the frame of a larger grievance.

These conflicts involved differing notions of how the soundscape of Malerkotla should be configured at particular temporal moments. As the issues progressed and increasingly engaged a broader segment of society, the aural aspects of the issue were less concerned with the performance of spiritual practices and more with the dominance of social space. Whereas attention is often paid to the importance of physical mobilization in the production of conflict, the aural aspect (**p.297**) is often less clearly attended. The work of Charles Hirschkind on the auditory practices associated with cassette sermons in late twentieth-century Cairo alerts us to the centrality of sound in producing ethical structures and listening as a technique of spiritual self-fashioning (Hirschkind 2006, 21–2). At the same time, documents on communal violence from colonial India treated conflicts over sound as proximate causes of riots, and therefore the British

sought to discipline the local populations, regulating the public use of sound in religious and cultural events. To a great extent, the Malerkotla authorities espoused the British colonial attitude and sought to regulate rather than to mediate, whereas the community members understood that negotiations over the soundscape of Malerkotla were also negotiations over the ethical basis of collective life. Ultimately, resolution to the disputes in Malerkotla came from the bottom up, worked out by representatives from across the community, rather than from the top down. Indeed, if colonial documents are to be believed, the local elites—and the nawab in particular—showed a singular lack of leadership in addressing the issues of arati, katha, and namaz.

For the British, sound required regulation just as the holding of parades or demonstrations. In an article on the way amplified sound affected the azan, anthropologist Naveeda Khan addresses the regulation of ritual sound in South Asia during the period of British rule. She observes how management of the soundscape fell under the rubric of the use of public space in general, requiring clear definition of the public and its 'proper' use (Khan 2011, 579). She cites Michael Roberts's study of colonial Ceylon in which he argues that '(t)he control of unacceptable forms of noise was an integral dimension of the British regime, as pertinent as the control of crime and disease' (Roberts 1994, 175). This emphasis on propriety of certain sounds and their audibility to a mixed audience meant that someone must judge what was appropriate and establish the grounds for that judgement. Implicit in the notion of propriety as the measure of acceptable sound is a moral judgement on the effect of sound on public order. For the colonial officer J.C. Donaldson, the means of adjudication involved experimentation, measurement, and some consideration of the religious implications of curtailing sound in Hindu and Muslim worship. Overall he was dismissive of any doctrinal concerns involved in the conflict: 'These two disputes have both arisen about matters **(p.298)** which are really extremely petty and involve no great question of religious belief or principle. They could easily be settled by agreement, among persons of good sense.'²⁷ Donaldson had duly measured the distance between worship spaces in all the cases, run experiments to judge the audibility of sound from one place to the other, and interviewed approximately forty witnesses and partisans to the complaint. Yet for all his effort to create metrics, by which a proper course of action could be determined, he failed to account for why sound mattered in the first place.

For the residents of Malerkotla, the debate over sound in worship was not just about the regulation of public space in the interest of public order. Rather, the auditory practices related to religious worship are a key aspect of cultivating an ethical self and tuning oneself to the spiritual sensorium associated with their faith. Therefore, conflict over these practices also involved competition over the shaping of a collective ethos and the relative place in the collective of various religious communities. The voice, of a person or an instrument, is not physically bound to the immediate environs of articulation. Indeed, sound travels, and at

some moments can travel quite far, from its point of origin. To the trained ear, certain sounds speak to them directly and ask for a specific response—to pray, come to the place of prayer, to awaken, to eat before fasting, to begin their personal devotions wherever they are. As Charles Hirschkind puts it in his work on the ethics of listening,

People's sensory responses are similar and in keeping with those that the author of the work intended to produce, to the extent that their capacities of hearing or vision have been shaped within a shared disciplinary context. They possess a specific affective-volitional structure as a result of the practices by which one has been formed as a member of a specific community. (Hirschkind 2001, 629)

This is to say that communities are defined, in part, by their ability to know one another through sense experiences and to respond appropriately to the sensory input. This is in part shaped by acculturative practices through which people learn through observation or instruction the rules of proper practice. Certain of these practices are more **(p.299)** highly ritualized, such as arati, katha, and namaz. The average Hindu or Muslim in mid-twentieth-century Malerkotla knew what to do when they heard the temple bell or the azan. Whether they responded appropriately (by coming to prayer) or not is less important for our present purposes than the fact that the call itself would be recognizable. Moreover, in a multi-religious community like Malerkotla, in a situation with a temple and a mosque with a shared wall, the audience for the calls to prayer would necessarily be literate in both modes of address and cognizant of one another's practices.

The arati-katha-namaz issue is all the more challenging to understand since the terms of the conflict did not remain stable. Arising in the context of nationwide land and political rights movements in the post-World War I environment, by 1940 another World War had altered the landscape. The attention of the state, in particular, was drawn elsewhere, perhaps providing additional impetus to the local actors to arrive at a mutually agreeable resolution. As the arati-katha-namaz issue unfolded, the question shifted from one concerning the relative status of Hindus and Muslims in a Muslim-ruled principality under the protection of the British Raj to a question of ethical citizenship and how auditory practices served as an arena for the working out of terms on which a shared civic life could be lived. Ultimately, the value of coexistence became pragmatically necessary and was construed by local leaders to be ethically superior than the articulation of oppositional identities through sound practices.

What Happened Afterwards?

At least some of the lessons learned from the arati-katha-namaz dispute have persisted in Malerkotla. Since Partition, there have been several instances when communal relations have been stressed. Most notably, and most often

remembered by residents in recent times, were two instances in which local temples were damaged following the destruction of the Babri Masjid by Hindu nationalists in 1992. In the immediate aftermath of these events, local religious leaders swiftly acted to reassure one another that the actions of the angry few did not reflect the sentiments of the deeply saddened majority. The culprits were apprehended and punished, or even bounced out of town. The leader of the Malerkotla Jama'at-i Islami (JI) at the time of the **(p.300)** Ayodhya conflict, Maulana Abdul Rauf, pointed out the importance of communal self-regulation and communication between religious communities—both principles that appear to have been at work in the resolution of the arati-katha-namaz issue. As he put it:

Here sometimes the situation has been bad. Sometimes bad things have happened, but when the atmosphere became bad, at times the Muslims themselves asked those Muslims not to do such things, and the Hindus did the same thing to Hindus, otherwise the Muslims would have helped only Muslims and the Hindus helped only Hindus. The situation would have deteriorated. Here a lot of such committees were founded of Hindus and Muslims, whose main aim was to suppress the bad elements and bad things, we should not help any type of bad element. So that is why the bad people were not successful in their intentions. (Personal Interview, 30 January 2001)

Indeed, the damaged buildings were repaired by donations, largely from a local Muslim industrialist, who declared that whenever a problem occurs in Malerkotla, the religious communities themselves discipline the perpetrators. Other members of Malerkotla's Muslim community share these views. For example, a schoolteacher extended the analysis:

Muslims of Malerkotla condemned this burning [of the temples]. Because the Qur'an does not allow it. The Qur'an says that if you are at war, and if somebody hides himself in his religious place, you spare him. So how can the followers of Islam think of putting somebody's religious place on fire? If we will attack or burn other religion's religious places, they will burn our religious places. There will be quarrels, and living will become hard. (Personal Interview, 22 January 2001)

The teacher recognizes one of the key principles of group life, that one must treat other citizens as one wishes to be treated. By grounding this view in a point drawn from revelation, he also provides a framework for coexistence within his understanding of Islam.

In an interview in 2004, local RSS leaders also claimed they helped to reduce tensions during the 1992 disturbance. They called the Muslim perpetrators 'misguided people,' a relatively subdued response even twelve years afterward.

They also proactively met with those in the Hindu community who seemed prone to retaliation. **(p.301)** They declared their confidence in the role of the police in stabilizing the situation and showing people 'how to go right'. The head of the RSS in Malerkotla, Dharamvir Gupta, said that not only was the temple wall damaged, but that the attackers tried to burn the pujari as well. Still, they saw their role as pacifiers rather than agitators because 'from conflict both communities become weak' (Personal Interview, 16 July 2004).

Members of all religious communities remember the event as significant; it was a time when the fabric of Malerkotla was tested, and its integrity prevailed. Through a combination of measures, residents managed the shock of the destruction of the Babri Masjid and the unjust retaliation on local Hindu sacred sites. By refusing to harbour the guilty and making reparations for the damage, the Muslim leadership pre-empted any backlash and created space for conciliatory Hindus to come forward. The momentum of these mutual efforts allowed the situation to defuse quickly and left little room for divisive elements or outside politicians to capitalize upon. Considerable social and moral force was brought to bear through the variety of tactics used by local leaders and regular citizens of all religions. In a large town of over 100,000 residents, this is not merely a matter of the village council or the principal actors meeting and coming to an agreement. The possibilities for multiple interpretations of the temple damage are many times increased, as is the potential for outsiders to take up the issue. That such efforts, if they even occurred, were thwarted before they could have an effect demonstrates enormous resourcefulness on the part of the local community. These strategies to re-establish equilibrium in Malerkotla are examples of what political scientist Ashutosh Varshney identifies as 'mechanisms of peace' (Varshney 2002, 52). Supported by networks in neighbourhoods, workplaces, and places of worship and by relationships at the associational, political, and official levels, the people of Malerkotla kept the peace and strengthened their shared stake in the collective ethos of harmony.

Another key element of peacemaking in Malerkotla that has roots in the resolution of the arati-katha-namaz problem is the development of a peace committee. After the Ayodhya conflagration, the local peace committee convened, made up of religious and civic leaders as well as the local subdivisional magistrate (SDM), the highest state level official in the town. In post-Independence Malerkotla, there are **(p.302)** governmental officials actively involved, but these figures are posted to the town from the various civil services of the government and are not local residents. It is the residents who are most connected and committed to the process of resolving communal strife. Importantly, however, the Malerkotla Peace Committee does not convene only *after* conflict. In fact its members meet more frequently, a practice that does much to facilitate trust and communication. For example, in the mid-1980s a cow turned up dead in Malerkotla and a rumour began that it had been killed by Muslim youths. Both cow and pig slaughter have been illegal in Malerkotla since

the late nineteenth century, and neither beef nor pork is readily available in town to this day. When the rumour spread, a crowd gathered and tensions increased. The police and the deputy commissioner, the highest-ranking civil servant, arrived. Together they made efforts to resolve the problem and disperse the assembly, initially to no avail. The JI leader Maulana Abdul Rauf described the incident:

There was a [Hindu] boy, he created the mischief by spreading the rumour that some Muslims had slaughtered a cow. Muslims then were determined that ... he should apologize. But he would not apologize. The DC [deputy commissioner] tried very hard but in vain. He said, 'I will have to take the course of law.' Something came in my mind. I suddenly stood up and said, 'I swear by God that if I have made a mistake, forgive me, never ever will I do such a thing again, which can cause riots in the city.' After I said this, two people from the RSS stood up and said also that 'I swear to God, and say that if I have made some mistake, forgive me for that.' Like this, one, two, three, people turn by turn stood up, and then that person's turn [the one who had started the rumour] came, and he also said, 'I swear by God, if I have made some mistake, forgive me, I will never ever do such a thing which can spoil the peace of the city.' Then everybody was happy; from all sides people said congratulations. The DC came out and said the matter is solved. (Personal Interview, 30 January 2001)

Even filtered through one individual's memory, this is a description of a functioning institutionalized peace system. The deputy commissioner arrived promptly, as did community leaders from the various religious groups. Although Abdul Rauf places the responsibility for the incident on a Hindu rumour-monger and emphasizes his own **(p.303)** role in defusing the tension, he also acknowledges the RSS leaders for immediately reciprocating in asking for forgiveness.²⁸

The appeal for forgiveness is an important strategy for bringing about reconciliation and managing conflict. Conflict resolution theorist and practitioner Marc Gopin places great emphasis on rituals of forgiveness. He explains that the gesture of apologizing and forgiving is not merely symbolic, but also opens up new possibilities for relationships between the partisans to a conflict (Gopin 2005, 182). Though Abdul Rauf was not professionally trained in techniques of conflict management, by apologizing for something everyone knew he had not himself done, he removed the stigma and potential loss of honour associated with such a plea. Furthermore, because he was a respected local leader, he gave apologizing a kind of symbolic status that increased the cultural capital of those who chose to ally with him. In recounting the incident, he shared credit for mitigating the tension with members of a Hindu organization, acknowledging that peacemaking is a collective project. The willingness of the RSS leaders to join the effort by asking for public witnesses to their commitment

to interreligious peace created space for the Hindu, who had started the rumour, to ask for forgiveness. Another crucial element of the strategy's efficacy was that all sides validated the resolution and acknowledged it as sufficient reparation to bring the conflict to a close.

Though no one seemed to know when a peace committee was first instituted to manage civil strife in Malerkotla, it is not difficult to see its precedent in principle, if not in fact, in the repeated gatherings of Hindu and Muslim leaders, who forged the resolution to the arati-katha-namaz issue. And so it is possible to understand how Malerkotla has earned its wide-ranging reputation as the 'cradle of love and friendship' (*Hind Samachar*, 2000). The convoluted dispute affords an opportunity to explore grassroots conflict resolution practices in a religiously plural community. While the British colonial sensibility was concerned with order and the regulation of public space, the Malerkotla citizenry was concerned with the organization of the (p.304) collective and with locating themselves advantageously within the civic body. The disputes over the soundscape of Malerkotla expressed the sense of disorder within the community on multiple levels, as the town, like others in India, grappled with shifting political, social, class, economic, and spiritual terrains.

Through a complex system of shared narratives, interactive arenas, collective interest, and integrated networks at the personal, political, and civil societal levels, Malerkotla has forged a system of disciplining dissent and promoting pro-social practices that allow the town to largely live up to its reputation. Malerkotla's systemic commitment to collective life is worth understanding because the town is not a utopian idyll, but a real place where friends and enemies, competitors and partners, neighbours and families deal with all the political, economic, social, spiritual, and cultural challenges that any diverse community must face.

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Notes:

(¹) Malerkotla State Archives, File 1-C/47-A, 1948, 'Declaration of RSS as Unlawful Body'.

(²) 'Arati' is a term for the regular worship of the deities in a Hindu temple. A 'katha' is recitation of a Hindu sacred text or narrative. 'Namaz' is the five-time daily prayer of Muslims (*salah* in Arabic).

(³) Namdhari Sikhs, sometimes called Kukas (due to sounds uttered during worship), are a sect of the religion who live a very pure, simple life and follow a living lineage of gurus, unlike mainline Sikhs. In 1872, one of their leaders instigated an attack on Malerkotla, ostensibly over the issue of cow killing. Under British protection at the time and with a British regent in leadership of

the state during the minority of the nawab, 69 Namdharis were shot from cannons in a particularly gruesome execution.

(⁴) According to the 1941 Census of India, the local population was 70 per cent Muslim, 21 per cent Hindu, 6 per cent Jain, and 3 per cent Sikh.

(⁵) In Malerkotla, the movement was multi-religious, and it unified wide sectors of society. Both Sikhs and Muslims were among the first officeholders. Giani Kehar Singh, Sewa Singh, and Talib Hussain were the main Malerkotla activists. Another report lists the secretary of the Panjab Riyasti Parja Mandal as S. Ranjit Singh of Malerkotla. According to this account, the main complaint against the nawab was that he was obsessed with grandeur and had legalized some forms of gambling. Cf. Nijjar (1974, 32–47); Brara (1989, 149); Walia (1972, 49–50); Sharma (1981).

(⁶) For more, see L/R/5, *Vernacular Press Reports—Kothala* (London: OIOC, 1927) and R/1/1/1685, *Malerkotla Affairs: Zamindari Association* (London: OIOC, 1927).

(⁷) See R/1/1/4156, *Malerkotla Finance* (London: OIOC, 1944); L/P&S/13/877, *Indian States, Gen'l Questions. Debts: Maler Kotla*: IOR; R/1/1/1418, *Debt of Malerkotla to Calcutta Firms* (London: OIOC); R/1/1/2023, *Irregularities of Nawab Re: Payment of Debt* (London: OIOC, 1930).

(⁸) Fortnightly report dated 15 November 1935. IOC, L/P&S/13/1345, *Malerkotla affairs*, 127–8.

(⁹) Malerkotla office of the chief minister, File 10 of 1936, 92.

(¹⁰) IOC, L/PJ/132, Report, 9.

(¹¹) IOC, L/P&S/13/1345, *Malerkotla affairs*, file no. 93 (report on p. 29).

(¹²) IOC, L/P&S/13/1345, *Malerkotla affairs*, 97.

(¹³) IOC, L/PJ/132, Report, 11.

(¹⁴) Indeed, during the rule of Ibrahim Ali Khan, under the superintendancy of Mr Heath, the infamous incident of the Namdhari attack on Malerkotla occurred. The execution of 72 Namdharis by placing them in front of cannons was one of the more horrifying incidents in colonial history.

(¹⁵) IOC, L/PJ/132, Report, 12–13.

(¹⁶) 'Communal Disorder', L/P&J/7/132, India Office Records, no date, 8. The report includes a list of communal conflicts and stops in 1928.

(¹⁷) 'Communal Disorder', L/P&J/7/132, India Office Records, no date, 13.

(¹⁸) 'Communal Disorder', L/P&J/7/132, India Office Records, no date, p. 13.

(¹⁹) *Commissioned Report on Communal Disturbances*, L/P&J/7/132, India Office Records, no date. The report includes a list of communal conflicts and stops in 1928.

(²⁰) See India Office Records: *Congress Activities in Malerkotla*, IOC, R/1/1/3006; R/1/1/2687. *Hindu Muslim, Arti-Namaz* (London: OIOC, 1935); R/1/1/2860. *Muslim Agitation in Malerkotla* (London: OIOC); R/1/1/2936. *Muslim Agitation at Malerkotla* (London: OIOC); R/1/1/3006. *Congress Activities in Malerkotla* (London: OIOC). Also Malerkotla State Archives: Malerkotla State Archives, File 1-C/47-A, 1948, 'Declaration of RSS as Unlawful Body'; 'B3/F8/1937—Hindu Mahasabha', 1937; '71/Z(B)/10/1938—Anjuman-i-Muhajirin', 1938; '6/Anjuman-i-Hidayat Agitation' [82/6/1/1937—100/6/124/1939]; 'B3/F16/1939—Refusal to Allow Visitation of Prisoners, Hijra', 1939; 'Y/50/Y/14/1945—Shia Affairs', 1945; 'Z/Shahidi Conference at Village Kothala', 1939.

(²¹) IOC, L/P&S/13/1345, Malerkotla affairs.

(²²) Letter from Chief Minister Jamil Khan to E.B. Wakefield, Secretary to the Resident, Punjab States, dated 19 October 1937, Malerkotla Office of the Chief Minister, File no. 10 of 1936, 8.

(²³) Letter from Chief Minister Jamil Khan to E.B. Wakefield, Secretary to the Resident, Punjab States, dated 19 October 1937, Malerkotla Office of the Chief Minister, File no. 10 of 1936, 149.

(²⁴) Malerkotla Office of the Chief Minister, File no. 10 of 1936, 98.

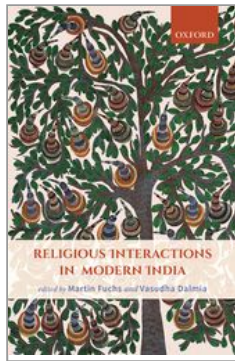
(²⁵) Malerkotla Office of the Chief Minister, File no. 10 of 1936, 96.

(²⁶) Malerkotla Office of the Chief Minister, File no. 10 of 1936, 112.

(²⁷) IOC, L/PJ/132, Report, 36.

(²⁸) I did look for media reports of the incident and found none. Other locals remembered the incident vaguely but were not present at the meeting Rauf described.

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Voting, Religion, and the People's Sovereignty in Late Colonial India

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Abstract and Keywords

The chapter discusses the connections between religion and popular sovereignty during the late colonial period in relation to voting. The author explores two key aspects of the legal contradictions embedded in elections, the legal concept of 'undue influence' and the relationship between conscience, community, and free choice. The paradoxes of sovereignty were increasingly transposed into the self, conceived as an inner struggle between conscience and free choice, on one side, and the coercive pressures of society, on the other. The chapter also discusses several election cases in India and Burma starting in the 1920s, in which issues of 'undue influence' were raised, and explicates the difficulties of distinguishing religion as a form of external power exerted by religious authorities, from free devotional commitment to a religious community. Emphasizing the Protestant missionary background of the ideas of a moral self, conscience, and free choice, the author asserts that such ideas resonated with many Indian Protestant missionary.

Keywords: colonial period, voting, legal contradictions, 'undue influence', conscience, community, free choice, Burma, Protestant missionary, Protestant missionary

There are few concepts so deeply embedded in popular, common sense understandings of political theory as the idea of the sovereignty of the people. Though historically rooted in European political theory, the concept of popular sovereignty is one that is today deeply entrenched in many parts of the world (and certainly in South Asia). Yet the historical relationship between the

development of popular sovereignty and changing understandings of the meaning of religion has hardly been systematically explored.

To understand the connections between religion and popular sovereignty, it is critical to look not just at the impact of new visions of sovereignty on religion, but also at the impact of older religious world views on the evolution of modern concepts of sovereignty. As Carl Schmitt argued in the 1920s, with respect to the Christian world, 'All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts' (Schmitt 1985, 86). Much the same could be said about the modern state in India. J.C. Heesterman has in fact pointed to the religious roots of deep-seated ideas about the nature of Indian sovereignty. At the heart of these ideas is what Heesterman has called the 'conundrum of the king's authority'. In ancient India, **(p.307)** legitimate royal sovereignty depended on the king somehow being a part of the community he ruled, and yet, simultaneously, standing outside it (Heesterman 1985, 118). To put this a different way, legitimacy hinged on the sovereign's ability to project himself, by standing outside worldly politics and associating himself with divinity, as the embodiment of the community as an abstract unity—even as he ruled from within the community, managing its differences and conflicts in the name of order.

Heesterman's analysis is critical for thinking about more modern forms of sovereignty, particularly arising from India's colonial encounter with Europe. This is because the conundrum of sovereignty that Heesterman identifies in India was one that was in fact central to the evolution of ideas about sovereignty in Europe as well, if perhaps in slightly different form. The vision of the sovereign king as simultaneously embedded in society and transcendent lay at the heart of the medieval European doctrine of 'king's two bodies', as explained by Ernst Kantorowicz, the one body mortal and grounded in worldly politics, the other eternal, defining the community as existing outside time (Kantorowicz 1997). Though such ideas were of course transformed in the modern era, they defined an underlying structure of thinking about sovereign authority that persisted even as the idea of the 'people's sovereignty' developed.

Understanding this conundrum of sovereignty with respect to the modern emergence of a concept of rule by the 'people' is thus critically important for understanding not only the continuities marking India's modern history, but also the frameworks within which ideas from Europe came to have Indian meaning.

The conundrum of sovereignty was particularly important for shaping the intersection in modern India between religious and political change. The idea of the sovereignty of the people, at least in the form that it came to India, is, of course, one that originated in Europe. In some ways, the narrative of the rise of popular sovereignty in its European context is well known. Central to the concept, as developed in different ways by thinkers such as Locke or Rousseau, was the notion of a social contract between the people and their rulers that

legitimized rule through consent of the governed. An idealized vision of the autonomous individual, capable of providing reasoned consent, thus lay at the heart of the idea. But in defining the relationship **(p.308)** between the people's consent and the concept of popular sovereignty, it is important to stress how the idea of the people's sovereignty built ultimately on precisely the same tensions—between worldliness and appeals to the transcendent—that marked the history of sovereignty more broadly. The image of the consent-bearing individual was in fact dependent on the mobilization of a vision of the individual in Europe, defined at once by the 'natural' claim to an autonomous capacity for free rational choice (which alone made 'consent' possible), and an individual who lived in, and was subject to, all the pressures of dependence and influence that inevitably marked the social world. The sovereign person at the root of the notion of the 'people's sovereignty' was like the sovereign king, both in the world and, at the same time, apart from it.¹

To understand how this played out in colonial India, it is important to see it in relationship to not only the concept of the 'people', but also a newly emerging concept of 'society', for the distinctive meanings attached to 'society' and to the 'people' had developed in Europe in critical mutual interrogation. If the 'people' as a political category (in sharp contrast, here, to the 'mob' or the 'masses') developed in nineteenth-century liberal theory around the imagined (and, abstractly, equal) natural capacity of each individual for autonomy and free choice (a critical component for government by consent), 'society' was increasing objectified in the nineteenth century as the structural sum of the worldly social and political relationships in which individuals were embedded. Unlike the ineffable essence that constituted the people, 'society' was thus, like nature, only knowable in this frame through science, particularly through the new realms of social science, ethnography, statistics, social psychology, and so on. It was thus in a sense 'disenchanted' (to use Weber's terminology), in that it was knowable only through its abstraction, not only from divinity, but also from the interior essence of the rational individual, the **(p.309)** imagined disembodied observer who stood outside it. In this sense, 'society' and the 'people' were antitheses, based on contradictory principles. And yet the exercise of the 'people's' sovereignty depended on the individual's grounding in both concepts, however much of a 'conundrum' this posed.²

To explain the relationship of 'society' and the 'people' in this way is, of course, to significantly overschematize it (and to separate it from the complex historical arguments that shaped it in a variety of different contexts). But I lay it out in this way simply to underscore Schmitt's point—and to stress the degree to which the relationship between these concepts mirrored long-standing religious understandings of the tensions between divinity and the world—in India and Europe alike—and the conundrums that this tension raised in the constitution of legitimate political sovereignty. In reality, of course, an exploration of the developing historical relationship of these concepts, both in institutional practice

and in individual thought, would be extraordinarily complex, whether for Europe or India, and is well beyond the scope of this chapter. But one way to approach this subject is by examining the tensions between conceptions of 'society' and of the 'people' in constituting the keystone figure in the operationalization of the sovereignty of the 'people' in India (and elsewhere), the individual as *voter*. An examination of the law and process of voting in India, as it was introduced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and as it drew on both British and Indian moral models, provides a critical window not just for examining the changing meaning of sovereignty, but also—and equally important for our purposes here—for tracing how the complex construction of the figure of the 'voter' was inescapably shaped by, and in turn shaped, new ideas about the meaning of religion, and, as we will see, the religious community.

In Europe, the core tension at the heart of voting—and of the intersection of the concepts of 'society' and of the 'people'—was crystallized by the introduction of the secret ballot, which occurred in Britain **(p.310)** in 1872.³ Though the secret ballot has now become naturalized in popular thinking as inseparable from democratic voting, its introduction was in fact hotly debated for decades in mid-nineteenth-century Britain—and in terms that open a window on the complex moral tensions involved in the concrete mobilization through voting of the 'people's sovereignty' as a political vision. For some, the secret ballot seemed to challenge a long-emerging vision of the 'public' in England as constituted by men, fortified by dominion in the private/domestic realm, who could forthrightly speak in public to bring reason to bear as a check on the state (Crook and Crook 2007, 449–71; Kinzer 1978, 237–56; O'Gorman 2006, 16–42). From such a perspective, secret voting was subversive of the public square itself, an affront not only to open, reasoned argument as the source of public authority, but also to basic, personal definitions of honour. Open choice (publicity) seemed to protect a sphere of public debate much like the 'public sphere' historically delineated in the work of Jürgen Habermas (1991).

But for others, secret voting was necessary not only to practically prevent the exercise of 'undue influence' by those with power in society (notably the aristocracy), but to underscore the meaning of voting as a pre-eminently free, individual act, with the individual's autonomy symbolized by his casting a ballot sealed off from the world and from 'society', in communication only with his own conscience. That this was a vision deeply influenced by religious models was reflected in a good part of the debate on the secret ballot in England. The contrast between an external world ('society') marked by influence and an inner one marked by individual conscience ('the people') was remarked on by many ballot supporters.⁴ The separation of the interior conscience **(p.311)** from corrupt worldly influence was conceptualized by many as lying at the heart of the people's sovereignty, and thus took on an almost mystical, religious significance. This was suggested by the comments of one important early ballot supporter, George Grote: the secret vote, as an expression of the voter's

unfettered free will, he said, was 'a secret of his own conscience, which no human being can fathom' (quoted in McKenna 2001, 51). It was, in other words, an act that could never be objectified. If the political results of voting were necessarily open, the act itself was hidden, internal, standing apart from society's constitutive bonds.

In practical terms, of course, the tensions surrounding the meaning of voting were hardly resolved by the 'ballot', and were reflected in the developing law regulating the voting process. Laws regulating voting were consolidated in Britain in the 1880s and were transferred to India, with only minor variations, with the introduction of the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms in 1919. But central to understanding these laws was the ongoing, and in some ways irreconcilable, tension between voting as an individual act signalling the sovereign voice of the 'people' and voting as a social act saturated with politics. To conceptualize voters as wholly standing outside 'society' was of course impossible (even nonsensical), for the value of elections lay precisely in the degree to which votes reflected differing sociological identities and interests, aggregated to produce politically salient electoral results. And yet the separate space of the individual conscience needed to be protected for the exercise of the people's sovereignty to be meaningful.

The introduction of elections and voting into colonial India hardly signalled, of course, a British recognition in 1919 of the sovereignty of the Indian 'people'. But it brought to India from Britain a structure of tensions relating to the nature of sovereignty (and to its religious framings)—and to the nature of the individual self—that ultimately resonated deeply with Indian ideas. This chapter will begin to explore this intersection by focusing on two key aspects of the legal contradictions embedded in elections: first, the legal **(p.312)** concept of 'undue influence', and, second, the relationship between conscience, community, and free choice that election law had to navigate.

Undue Influence

It is the legal concept of 'undue influence' that, perhaps better than any other, unlocks the developing history of British election law as it came eventually to India. The concept of undue influence is important also in that it suggests the underlying historical connections between popular sovereignty and capitalism. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to trace these connections in any detail, it is worth noting that the law of undue influence developed initially in England with respect to the history of contracts and wills (Winder 1939, 97–120), and thus suggests how the protection of a vision of individual freedom of consent was related ideologically to the development of a property-based capitalist system (based on the freedom of contracts). Capitalism too, one might suggest, required a concept of individual freedom of will/action that could

operate in counterpoint to the actual inequalities of wealth and power that it generated in the real 'societal' world.

As it came to apply to voting, however, its significance can be traced in two quite different directions. First, the notion of 'undue influence' is one of the critical ideological/legal components explaining the limitations that marked the historical development of the 'people's sovereignty' as an ostensibly universalizing yet practically exclusionary concept. This provides a critical cultural backdrop for understanding the coming of the concept to India within the framework of a highly authoritarian colonial regime. Since individual autonomy was a prerequisite for a non-corrupt system of voting, the logic of voting itself dictated that those trapped in the snares of dependence could not be given the right to vote. This had been the foundation for property restrictions on voting in England, and it was all the more relevant to the restriction of voting when it was introduced in India, where the power of social coercion was, as the British saw it, particularly rife. It was, in fact, William Blackstone in the mid-eighteenth century who had explained the logic of a highly exclusionary system of voting most clearly in these terms:

(p.313) If it were probable that every man would give his vote freely, and without influence of any kind, then, upon the true theory and genuine principles of liberty, every member of the community, however poor, should have a vote in electing those delegates, to whose charge is committed the disposal of his property, his liberty, his life. But since that can hardly be expected in persons of indigent fortunes, or such as are under the immediate dominion of others, all popular states have been obliged to establish certain qualifications; whereby some, who are suspected to have no will of their own, are excluded from voting. (Blackstone 1992, 1:165)

This applied not only to those without property but also to children and women, who were dependent on their parents and husbands respectively, and thus 'suspected to have no will of their own'. The structure of society itself dictated, in other words, that dependent and unfree voters had to be excluded from voting if the basic principle of the 'people's consent' was to be upheld.

Nevertheless, the tension between the ideal of individual autonomy and worldly 'influence' also provided the implicit logic for a liberal vision of progress. In time, all could theoretically 'mature' or 'develop' to a position of free choice and autonomy (just as children did), even though this progress was always constrained by the powerful bonds of influence and dependence defining society. The history of nineteenth-century 'reform' in Britain seemed to confirm this. The hallmark of liberal politics was that 'ideals are simultaneously affirmed and deferred' (Srinivasan 2004, 23), reflecting the reality of society's conditions. Such ideas were a defining feature of 'liberal empire' in India more generally,

and they operated powerfully with respect to voting and its significant property restrictions (Mehta 1999).

But the law of 'undue influence' also developed in a second direction, to provide a set of legal limits on the actual operation of influence in election campaigns to protect the autonomy of those who *were* given the vote. Its operation suggested the critical ways in which the paradoxes of sovereignty were increasingly envisioned as operating *within* the self, a self defined by the interior struggle between conscience and free choice, on the one side, and the coercive pressures of society, on the other. Not surprisingly, the law defining 'corrupt' electoral practices thus expanded in England precisely as the franchise (p.314) was gradually expanded to wider classes by the various reform bills of the nineteenth century (O'Leary 1962; Rix 2008). Late nineteenth-century British laws covered a range of forms of 'undue influence', from bribery to treating to intimidation (including that exercised by state officials), that potentially threatened new voters. With the establishment of elected provincial councils in India after 1919, these laws were transferred in full force to India, whatever the severe, property-based limitations on the size of the electorate.

Perhaps the most telling of these laws in demonstrating an underlying vision of the self was the law controlling the forms of 'undue influence' relating directly to religion. The law of religious 'undue influence', as it came to be embodied in Indian law in 1919, drew directly on older English traditions. The new provincial codes of India's election law declared that it was a corrupt electoral practice to attempt to induce any 'candidate or voter to believe that he or any person in whom he is interested will become or will be rendered an object of divine displeasure or spiritual censure' (Swarup 1936). Free voting and free conscience were deemed incompatible, in other words, with all coercive appeals to *external* religious authority, as these threatened the vision of individual autonomy implicit in the very idea of elections.

As it had developed in Britain, the negative model that had shaped this vision of spiritual 'undue influence' was the Catholic Church, particularly the Church in Ireland. Charges of religious 'undue influence' had been brought in a number of Irish election petitions in the second half of the nineteenth century, and in some of these cases, the election of members of Parliament had been overturned on the grounds that the Catholic clergy had exercised 'undue influence' over the voters. The majority of these cases involved what was called 'spiritual intimidation', which ranged from clerical denunciations from the pulpit, to exclusion from the sacraments, to refusals by the clergy to accept customary Christmas or Easter offerings. In fact, there is little solid historical evidence to prove, one way or another, whether such 'intimidation' actually deterred Irish Catholic voters from casting free ballots, or was, in fact, widespread (Whyte 1960, 245–9). But the structure of these cases suggested the distinctive vision of religion that lay behind the law's structuring (and behind the ideal of

sovereignty vested in the 'people'): the legal creation of the image of **(p.315)** the autonomous voter required a counter-image of socially embedded religion that was incapable of separating worldly authority from the autonomous operation of individual conscience. This confusion came to be central to this form of electoral 'corruption'.

Such cases provided the critical models for the operation of the law in British India. Petitions challenging the results of elections to the new provincial councils were referred after 1920 to Indian election tribunals, which in cases of religious undue influence frequently made reference back to British case law, defining instances of clerical 'spiritual intimidation' with respect to this Irish model. In a United Provinces case from 1924, for example, an election tribunal weighed a charge of religious 'undue influence' levelled against a candidate who made electoral use of a poem implying that he was a 'Charyari' and Khilafat supporter, while his opponents were Shia. The tribunal assessed the corrupting effect of such language by making reference to the model of spiritual intimidation contained in an Irish case from the 1890s, in which a cleric had implied grave danger to the souls of those who supported Charles Stewart Parnell.⁵ Comparing that rhetoric with the language in this case, the tribunal drew a distinction between 'religious prejudice' and 'undue influence', and decided that the anti-Shia rhetoric in this case fell within legal bounds (Hammond 1936, 445–6). But in another case from 1924, a tribunal threw out an election from Muzaffarnagar district on the grounds (among others) that a local maulvi 'who interests himself in Sunni-Shia disputes' had arrived at a polling station on horseback and declared that 'anyone who voted for the petitioner would be considered a "kafir"'. This, they declared, was 'likely to make ignorant and superstitious persons **(p.316)** believe that they would be objects of divine displeasure if they voted for the petitioner', particularly since the maulvi 'belonged to the Jhojas', a sub-caste to which many of the voters themselves belonged. Such pressure, the tribunal found, '... undoubtedly falls within the category of undue influence' (Hammond 1936, 518–23). Actions of monks in a constituency in Burma were held to be corrupt on similar grounds. According to the evidence, monks boycotted supporters of an opposing candidate, refusing to officiate at funerals or accept offerings, and administered oaths to villagers whose effect was: 'If I vote for U Ba Yi may I go to heaven, and if I vote for U Sein Ba may I be sent to hell.' On these grounds, the tribunal threw out the election, noting that 'the administering of an oath of the nature in evidence to a voter by a Buddhist monk is clearly an interference with the free exercise of electoral rights' (Hammond 1936, 460–5).

The existence of this law did not always, of course, make it easy to distinguish religion as a form of external power wielded by religious specialists from religion as an inner realm. A good example comes from another Burmese case (Mandalay). Once again in this case there was evidence of monks administering oaths to candidates and voters. But in this case an election tribunal found that

such oaths simply emphasized the 'five precepts', and that the candidates themselves merely 'undertook to swear to act unitedly and harmoniously, and, in future, without regard for their lives to act justly for the welfare and advancement of their country and religion'. Though politics and religion were here clearly mixed, the implication was that such oaths acted in this case not as a form of mental coercion that breached the boundaries of the voting booth (through threats of 'divine displeasure or spiritual censure'), but rather as an appeal that activated their free inner commitments (though the tribunal did not put it in quite these terms) (Hammond 1936, 511–15). The problem in reaching a decision in such cases was underscored from a somewhat different direction by a case from Ferozepur in the Punjab. In that case, the charge of 'undue influence' hinged on a fatwa obtained by one of the candidates declaring the opposing candidate unfit to represent the Muslims because he was a Mirzai (Ahmadi). Though this clearly gave the tribunal pause, they nevertheless noted the important distinction between an appeal drawing attention to the 'interests' of the Muslims, and to who should be their appropriate representatives, and an appeal (p.317) declaring a vote to be a sin or holding out a divine threat of retribution. This applied even to a statement that it was not lawful (*jaiz*) to vote for a Mirzai, since this was followed not by a declaration that it was a sin, but by the opinion that this was 'inimical to the interests of Islam'. After all, they noted, even the law in Britain allowed that the Catholic clergy had the 'undoubted right' to canvass and 'induce persons to vote in a particular way, but that it is not lawful to declare it to be a sin to vote in a different manner or to threaten to refuse the sacraments to a person for so doing'. Here the argument seemed to be that as long as the clergy confined their appeals to the realm of 'interests', and the appropriateness of service to the community, then this did not cross the line into a corrupt effort to bring spiritual authority to bear in limiting the voter's free choice (Hammond 1936, 367–740).

Such decisions seemed to lay open a large arena of uncertainty as to how religious authority was actually constituted as both a worldly phenomenon and as acting on an autonomous self—and thus how the operation of religious influence in general was to be understood. Indeed, fundamental questions as to the very meaning of 'religion' seemed to lie at the heart of many of these cases. To put these election cases in historical perspective, it is important to set them also against the larger backdrop of the changing, and contested, definitions of 'religion' itself in colonial India—and most particularly with respect to debates on the relationship of a moral self to the pressures of a potentially corrupting world. The law of 'undue influence', as we have seen, contained within it a model of 'religion' in which the world and the inner conscience were configured as sharply separate realms. Election law can thus be read in this context as part of a much larger, if conflicted, British pedagogical project, one caught between British visions of colonial order, on the one hand, and of themselves as the bearers of a new moral civilization built on new images of the individual self, on

the other. Yet the law also resonated with long-standing Indian moral ideas on the constitution of sovereignty, which had, of course, themselves taken on new meanings in the wider context of colonial rule and of religious reform in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is little wonder, then, that issues of the law of voting (and popular sovereignty) and of religious reform were closely interrelated.

Much, of course, has been written on trajectories of religious reform in nineteenth-century India. As many scholars have suggested, **(p.318)** evolving images of Protestant Christianity provided important models for new visions of the meaning of 'religion' in India. British orientalist played an important role in reformulating intellectually the very meaning of 'religion' in the Indian context, envisioning new modular definitions of religion defined by a common set of components (scripture, ritual, theology, religious specialists, and so on)—and by the relationships among them.⁶ In examining an important group of Protestant missionaries in Bombay, for example, Mitch Numark has shown how missionary intellectuals tried to fit the Indian religions they encountered into a common template, defined by distinctive 'scriptures' that were, in spite of manifold worldly variations in religious practice, focused on uncovering a 'singular truth' (Numark 2006). Viewed as a backdrop to the assumptions shaping election law, what is most compelling in these new visions was a normative vision of 'religion' defined by a radical separation of that which was external and objectified, on the one hand (a product of 'society'), and the inner core of conscience and free choice of the believer, on the other (whose roots lay outside the social world). 'Scripture', as the source of core truths, was of necessity abstracted in such a view from both 'society' and history, and in the process made available for internalization, to act on the individual's autonomous self.

Though election law made little direct reference to such a model, its focus on spiritual 'undue influence' can be seen, when placed in this context, as having an integral relationship to a normative model for religious transformation that was associated with broader currents of religious change. Indeed, the implications of this were clearly suggested in Sir Laurie Hammond's pioneering explication of Indian election law in 1920. The law itself was providing, as he saw it, a normative guide to candidates and their agents, a pedagogical model. 'The election agent', Hammond wrote, with the models of law before him, 'should take pains to see that his candidates' election addresses and speeches made by supporters do not in form or their subject-matter ... contain anything that may be interpreted as a threat of spiritual injury or caste excommunication'. Hammond thus implied that the law could be used to foster a normative view of individual autonomy **(p.319)** as the core of electoral practice. Election law could help, for example, 'to destroy the Brahmanical influence which, it has been represented, is so powerful in Madras', he noted (Hammond 1920, 102–3). It could be read as part of the impressing on India of an underlying vision of religion (itself as a modular form) in which the operation of external religious

authority could be conceptualized as a potential threat to (or at least in fundamental tension with) the inner conscience of the believer.

To point to the relationship between India's new election law and new British principles of thinking about religion is, of course, hardly to suggest that these ideas necessarily had any deep purchase on Indian thinking or practice as elections were introduced in the early twentieth century. Normative legal views of voting should not be confused with the meanings that voters themselves attached to the act. Yet, certainly such ideas resonated with many Indian religious reformers as well. Indeed, if reformist Indian ideas drew in some ways on new European (and Protestant missionary) models of 'religion', they also had deep roots within India, which were related to the common pressures arising from reformulations of ideas about sovereignty that were an inevitable product of the political upheavals of the eighteenth century and subsequently. Though reform movements in India took a variety of highly complex forms (which are well beyond the scope of discussions here), the dynamic political framework of Mughal decline in eighteenth century India—and the rethinking of sovereignty to which this gave rise—had a critical impact on a range of reformist religious pressures in India (thus suggesting, if somewhat speculatively, the importance of conceptions of sovereignty in shaping the interconnections between indigenous and colonial influences on religious change more generally).

The centrality of a critique of worldly, religious 'corruption' was, in fact, an important feature in the thinking of many South Asian reformers. In his recent book, J. Barton Scott has focused on anti-clericalism (and on the illegitimate influence of religious charlatans) as a central element in the development of nineteenth-century Indian religious thinking. The contours of a tension between 'true religion' and worldly hypocrisy gained new influence in elite public discourse, he argues, with the widely publicized Maharaj libel case in Bombay in 1862. Perhaps even more noteworthy were reform movements that **(p.320)** drew on the language of worldly corruption to attack the positions of established religious leaders. Scott takes as one of his primary examples Dayanand Saraswati (founder of the Arya Samaj), who, like the missionaries, saw the 'scriptures' (the Vedas, in this case) as a source of internalized truth, standing outside history—and apart from the corruption of worldly priestcraft. The missionary influence on this critique was evident in Dayanand's description of Brahmins as 'popes', whose corrupt authority was thus framed within the anti-Catholic template of Protestant reform. But he linked this to much older tensions within Indian religions, as evidenced by his use of the term 'pope-lila' to describe the corruption inherent in the confusion of worldly play and devotion to avatars ('lila'), with a Truth that stood outside worldly society (Scott 2016, 150–76). The political implications of this were of course complex, but the emphasis on the importance of autonomous, internalized individual morality/rationality (in contrast to worldly devotions) was readily translated into the engagement by

many Arya Samaj followers with the new debates on sovereignty marking the early twentieth century.⁷

The history of reform among Muslims also suggests parallels, though once again, one can only speculate on the roots of the complex history of religious reconfiguration in Islam. The prominence of attacks on 'customary' practices in Islamic reformism (whether Sufi or otherwise) in the eighteenth–twentieth centuries clearly provides a clue. As Francis Robinson suggests, reformers were 'determined to rid the world of its enchanted places, that is of anything that might diminish the believers' sense of responsibility' (Robinson 1997, 3). Though Robinson calls this a shift toward 'this-worldly' religion, it seems clear that it was rooted also in a widespread normative reformist vision of religious experience as separated from society and rooted **(p.321)** in an internal realm, influenced by conscience and scripture, that stood apart from society itself, even as the believer remained 'in the world' and brought moral rationality to bear upon it.⁸ Perhaps most intriguing, it also seems to have been linked to profound shifts in Muslim thinking about sovereignty, as the foundations of the Mughal Empire disintegrated and as new forms of capitalism spread in the eighteenth-century world, shifts whose initial impulses preceded the formal establishment of colonial rule. This was, in fact, a critical undercurrent in the work of Shah Waliullah and his successors.⁹ All of this suggests, if perhaps in extremely speculative terms, the vital links between questions of religious reform and political sovereignty—and particularly relating to the meaning of the 'people'—shaping South Asia's history.

Yet, having noted these parallels, it is also clear that the notion of spiritual 'undue influence', though linked to an idealized model of the individual with important roots both in British law and in South Asia traditions, was extraordinarily difficult to bring to bear in specific cases. As the law of religious 'undue influence' suggested, 'influence' was conceptualized as involving two aspects. On the one hand, it was a central constitutive element in the construction (and imagining) of 'society'. As voters were part of society, a distinction between 'influence' (which was an inescapable building block of society) and 'undue' influence was, in this sense, in the realm of religion much like the distinction between licit and 'undue' influence in any other social sphere; it rested on the identification of forms of worldly power (or threats) that undercut individual choice. In this context, defining **(p.322)** what constituted licit influence for a priest was much like defining the constitution of licit influence for a landlord; as Hammond put it (citing, once again, the judicial language from an Irish case), "'The priest's" true influence ought to be like a landlord's true influence, springing from the same sources, mutual respect and regard, sympathy for troubles or losses, sound advice, generous assistance, and kind remonstrance. And where these exist a priest can exercise his just influence without denunciation and the landlord can use his just influence without threat or violence' (Hammond 1920, 105). But in another sense, the question of

spiritual 'undue influence', particularly when cast in the light of the reformed visions of religion historically shaping the concept, was about something much more fundamental. It was about locating a new space of sovereign autonomy within the individual, a space symbolized by the individual standing alone with his conscience in the voting booth. The application of election law was thus, in practice, less about regulating an existing social reality than it was part of a twentieth-century process by which a new *image* of the individual, with roots in developing traditions of both religious reform and political theory, was in the process of being created—a process in which the legal definition of the voter played a central role.

Free Choice, Conscience, and Community

With its connections to a long history of religious reform, it is not surprising that the application of election law in late colonial India was thus halting—and that the emerging image of the 'voter' was in fact contradictory. But the tensions that marked the emergence of popular sovereignty—and the transfer of the conundrum of the king's authority into the sovereign self—were not simply matters of the law's practical application. They were also deeply rooted in the law's understandings of the relationship between inner conscience and the outer world. To explore further the conflicted relationship between the self and the world that shaped the meaning of the sovereign 'people', it is thus important to step back and examine briefly the law's attempted negotiation of the relationship between two key concepts that have shaped the discussion so far—'conscience' and 'autonomy' (or free choice)—and their relationship to another key term, 'religious community'.

(p.323) The complex nature of the relationship between 'choice' and 'conscience' has been suggested by Michael Sandel, in his discussion of religion's role, in a very different context, in defining the foundations of democracy in the United States. For all their stress on both conscience and individual autonomy, the late eighteenth-century architects of popular sovereignty in the United States, Sandel argues, did not see conscience and free choice as necessarily reinforcing each other. Rather, they tended to see conscience as primarily a matter of obedience. 'Where freedom of conscience is at stake, the relevant right is to perform a duty, not to make a choice', he writes (Sandel 1998, 87). This certainly did not mean that freedom of choice and freedom of conscience were unrelated. The exercise of conscience was itself, as James Madison put it, 'an inalienable right' of the free individual (Sandel 1998, 86). But conscience operated at the intersection of independent natural reason and a received scriptural/religious tradition. If conscience was, in the thinking of theorists of popular sovereignty, internal and defined by the operation of autonomous reason independent of external societal authority (religious or otherwise), it was nevertheless often dictated also by god's special claims to obedience.

Given this context, the relationship of conscience to the history of religious community has long presented a difficult issue for historians. One example of this is Marshall Hodgson's structural use of 'conscience' in his magisterial history, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Hodgson 1974). As Bryan Turner argues in critiquing Hodgson, Hodgson constructed his history precisely around a conceptual separation of conscience from society, structuring his narrative around a dynamic tension between *history* (the changing sociopolitical world) and *conscience* (an individual essence standing apart from history and providing the unifying and unchanging kernel for the story). Turner, in fact, critiques this separation of conscience from the world as part of Hodgson's effort to assimilate the history of Islam to a basically Protestant world view—a world view defined by the separation of 'piety/individual *versus* religion/society' (Turner 1994, 60). But for Hodgson, it is precisely the conceptual separation of conscience from the world (a separation that echoes, we might add, the 'conundrum' defining modern popular sovereignty) that gives the 'venture' of Islam a universal resonance within a world historical context. Though Turner sees in this an **(p.324)** *ahistorical* failure to fully escape from a Euro-American Orientalism, Hodgson casts his view of conscience—as separated from, and yet in dynamic tension with, the pressures of the world—as central to an essentially 'human' world story in which the 'enchantment' of the conscience-bearing individual (though Hodgson does not quite put it this way) is a central theme.¹⁰

But there is a deep tension in Hodgson's work, particularly with respect to the relationship between conscience and religious community, that Turner's critique brings clearly to the surface. However universal the implications of Hodgson's vision, his view of a conscience abstracted from the world does double duty. It is central not just to a global but also to a specifically Islamic history. Indeed, it is at the unifying heart of that history. A deep and unresolved tension between the particular and the universal thus stalks his story. If a vision of conscience as a definer of the autonomous rational/moral individual takes on universal resonance in Hodgson's account, individual conscience also becomes a marker of the specificity and continuity of the Islamic moral *community*, a community linked to scripture (and thus transcending 'society'), but existing in the world in interaction with ever-changing historical realities. From this perspective, his work underscores precisely the tensions surrounding the relation of conscience—and *obedience* to conscience—to the problematic meaning, in such a universalizing narrative, of the free individual in the world (an issue that, as Hodgson clearly shows, Muslim thinkers had long grappled with). Though the community itself is the touchstone for free conscience, independent of the social pressures of the world, it also binds individuals to a particular *unchosen* community existing in the world itself.

(p.325) Religious community thus defined a difficult and intractable problem for the very structures on which popular sovereignty was based. Tensions between conscience and the moral pressures of religious community, in fact, came to mark election law in India in ways that illustrated this, for the pressure of community could seemingly operate independently of direct worldly threats by specific religious authorities, yet still challenge an image of free, individual consent. A good example comes from a case we have already briefly looked at, that involving the dissemination in Ferozepur in 1924 of a fatwa proscribing voting for an Ahmadi.

In that case, the very meaning of 'religious community'—and its influence on individual choice—came to be an important issue. The particular form of the problem was shaped by the conduct of the elections within the framework of 'separate electorates' (based on religious community). Separate electorates were based on objectified census definitions that were largely externalized, with little reference to internal religious belief or individual choice. Behind them was a vision of religious community as lying almost wholly in the objectified realm of 'society'.¹¹ They can be thus interpreted in one sense as reinforcing the separation of religion's worldly aspects from those relating to individual free choice. But, in fact, as the Ferozepur case suggests, if the constituency to be represented was officially a 'Muhammadan' constituency, then it was only natural that the question as to whether a candidate truly fit the description of the community should enter into the election, and in ways that impinged on individual conscience. Given the state's religious definition of the constituency, was it 'undue influence', and a challenge to the individual's freedom of choice, if Ahmadi—in this case an Ahmadi candidate—were said to be 'kaffars', or non-Muslims, in such an election? In the end, the tribunal hardly came to any clear conclusion on this issue, and concluded only with the tentative comment: '... The point is not perhaps free from difficulty...' (Hammond 1936, 373). But their comments suggested the difficulties, when 'religious community' was involved, in framing the issue as *either* one of internalized conscience *or* of the impact of worldly influence, as if these could, in practical reality, be clearly separated.

(p.326) This conundrum took on all the greater practical urgency as voting intersected with new forms of public politics in India in the 1920s and 1930s. In fact, an expanding realm of publication in the years after the introduction of dyarchy in 1919 led to a widening, middle-class dominated 'public sphere' of rational debate in India, dominated by 'community' spokesmen of various types, some claiming to speak for the 'nation', like the Indian National Congress, but others speaking for a variety of different groups, communities, and interests, including religious communities. This was an emerging politics of conflicting interests and identities, theoretically mediated in the voting booth, at least in part, by the rational, sovereign voter.

But, increasingly in this era, this politics of community *interests* operated in counterpoint to—and sometimes in significant tension with—another, largely middle-class politics of a very different sort, and one that, arguably, reflected the conundrums of emerging visions of the people's sovereignty and of its relationship to 'religious community'. Markus Daechsel has described the increasing prominence, particularly in the period after 1930, of what he calls a 'politics of self-expression', which was predicated precisely on the public projection of a self conceptualized as standing apart from (and in opposition to) 'society'. This was, as Daechsel puts it, a 'politics against society', which rejected visions of contending interests rooted in society's objectification in favour of a pure politics of individual self-assertion (Daechsel 2006). Daechsel does not particularly link this to the contradictions associated with voting, or with an emerging image of the sovereign 'people', seeing it more as a phenomenon associated with the growth of urban consumerism. But it is easy to see at the root of this politics a reflection of the image of the free, autonomous individual voter, conceptualized as standing apart in the voting booth from society's bonds.

Such movements, in fact, crystallized in dramatic form the problematic relationship of individual autonomy and religious community that was implicit in the law relating to voting. The tensions between individual autonomy and obedience to religious community were in fact negotiated in many of the public movements of these years largely through a redefinition of the bonds of community as bonds not of obedience to external authority (or to conscience), but of individual affect and devotion. The 1920s and 1930s were in fact **(p.327)** an era marked by a number of powerful public mobilizations defined by the projection of the autonomous self through acts of devotion to community symbols, and images of public sacrifice for their protection.¹² Casting community in terms of religious devotionism was of course nothing new in India in these years. But in the context of this era, it could be read as a new public expression of the social autonomy of the sovereign self.

The tensions generated by such movements framed several dramatic legal cases from Punjab following the 1937 provincial elections. At the heart of these cases were responses to the agitation over the Shahidganj mosque in Lahore, whose destruction by Sikhs in 1935, followed by police firings, and the wounding and killing of a number of Muslim demonstrators, had galvanized a public image of Muslim community defined by open acts of individual sacrifice in defence of the mosque as a potent community symbol. But the question in these cases was the degree to which such an image of community, even when defined in public by free individual affect, could now compromise free choice in the voting booth by activating the conscience's claims to obedience to a public image of community. This question was at the heart of an election petition filed by Chaudhri Afzal Haq (a leader of the Ahrar Party), a candidate in the Hoshiarpur West (Muhammadan) constituency. As Afzal Haq's petition alleged, the winning

candidate in this election had tried to frame Afzal Haq as a 'traitor to the community' for failing to identify himself with the Shahidganj agitation, a portrayal that was, the petition charged, not only an attempt to exert 'undue influence' (by suggesting that a vote for Afzal Haq threatened a voter's place in the community), but also an effort to defame Afzal (p.328) Haq's private character (another election offense). Accusations that Afzal Haq had taken the side of the Sikhs in the agitation, and thus betrayed the 'Muslim community', were punctuated by the circulation at election rallies of supposedly maimed survivors of the Shahidganj firing, one of whom was said to have declared that 'when they were being fired at, Chaudhri Afzal Haq was eating Kababs'. This was probably pure imagination, but it dramatically juxtaposed free, devotional attachment to the community with oblivious immersion in everyday social life, a seeming denial by Afzal Haq of the basic imperatives of *both* conscience *and* devotion to community. Though the tribunal ruled in this case that the evidence of both undue influence and defamation was not sufficient to overturn the election, it was clear that the charges in this case hinged not on the 'undue' worldly influence of specific religious leaders on the voters' minds, but on the potentially coercive moral pressure on the individual conscience exerted by a particular public image of religious community itself (Punjab, Second Election Petitions Commission 1937, 1195-211).

Such pressures were yet more clearly delineated in another case from the 1937 elections, this one focusing on the issue of public electoral oaths. The problem of electoral oaths was not a new one in electoral law—nor was the interpretation of oaths and their meanings a new issue in Indian moral discourse. But in the Amritsar urban Muhammadan constituency in the wake of the Shahidganj agitation, this issue took on new meanings. In this case, Mian Feroze-ud-Din Ahmed (a popular newspaper writer) was accused of asking voters at the end of his election speeches to swear by oath that they would support Saif-ud-din Kitchlew, who had actively supported the Shahidganj cause. One witness recounted the process:

[Mian Feroze-ud-Din] said 'If you are honest and faithful people, you must make a promise with God as your witness that you will not go back on it.' He then asked them to repeat the *Kalma* and raise their hands. In fact he asked the audience to promise on oath that they themselves would vote for Dr. Kitchlew and also persuade their friends and relations to vote for him. (Punjab, Second Election Petitions Commission 1938, 358)

As the counsel for the respondent explained it, such an oath, if entered into *freely*, did no more than confirm the voter's commitment to making a free choice as a member of the community, undeterred (p.329) by other forms of coercive worldly influence (Punjab, Second Election Petitions Commission 1938, 362). It represented simply an appeal, as Mian Feroze-ud-Din had himself put it, to that which is 'honest and faithful' in the voter, the source of the voter's own

autonomy. But as the petitioners argued, promises on oath, particularly with references to the *kalma* or the Quran, were necessarily a matter of conscience-bound duty. 'I think it is the duty of every Musalman to abide by a promise made after repeating the Kalma', one witness said, 'and a Musalman who breaks such a promise is in my opinion no Musalman' (Punjab, Second Election Petitions Commission 1938, 361). In such circumstances, Feroze-ud-Din's appeal represented a clear form of 'undue influence', using images of community (and references to scripture) not to freely encourage the voters' association with the Shahidganj cause, but to bind them by oath to particular candidates.

The tribunal's attempted assessments of these arguments were in some ways tortured, and involved trying to assess the meaning of verses from the Quran on the subject of obedience to the community. But most critical for the law, in the end, were the implications of entering into such an oath *in public*. 'If now after raising your hands and repeating the Kalma, any one among you does not vote for Dr. Kitchlew', Feroze-ud-Din Ahmad was reported to have said, 'what kind of a man will he be?' (Punjab, Second Election Petitions Commission 1938, 361). What would the community think of him? The 'undue influence' here was not the pressure of a religious leader threatening spiritual censure based on scripture (for Feroze-ud-Din Ahmed had no credentials at all as a religious leader), but rather the impact of worldly *community* pressure. Indeed, the case hinged on the powerful influence of the very *idea* of community, enacted in public, on the individual conscience, 'supported as it was by references to the demolition of the Shahidganj mosque, and the deaths of Muslims which resulted from the firing during the ensuing disturbances, in regard to which the feeling among the rank and file of the Muslim community is undoubtedly very deep'. A particular vision of community, enacted in the public sphere (whatever its roots in individual affect), was thus the source here, the tribunal concluded, of 'interference' with 'the free exercise of the right to vote', and the election was thus voided. (Punjab, Second Election Petitions Commission 1938, **(p.330)** 363). As an entity both in the world and in the moral imagination, the community exerted pressures on the voters' minds that seemingly made the reconciliation of individual freedom of choice and the dictates of conscience virtually impossible.

Such cases in fact crystallized the critical tensions surrounding 'religious community'—and beneath that, questions of conscience—in defining the position of the sovereign voter. Religious communities were, of course, constructed within the world, a product of the intersection between religious traditions and the forms of authority defining everyday power and life. In practice such religious communities in the world took many forms and were—at least as the British viewed it—central to Indian society. To the extent that religious communities were defined by external religious authorities (like the Catholic hierarchy in Ireland, for example), they were easily identifiable as a potential threat to individual conscience and free choice. But to the extent that adherence to religious communities was dictated not by obedience to external religious

leaders, but by obedience to the mandates of individual conscience itself, they raised more difficult questions. Religious communities in fact defined the clearest ground on which the dictates of conscience, as a source not of choice but of obedience, could be read as potentially interfering with the freedom of choice that was so central to the sovereign voter's conceptualization. Yet in a politics of public devotion and affect, the lines between the operation of influence and of free devotional commitment were extraordinarily difficult, if not impossible, to pin down—as such election cases suggested.

The dilemmas this engendered were in many ways played out in the politics leading to India's Independence and Partition in 1947, though this is a subject beyond the scope of this chapter. It was, one could argue, the very image of the people's sovereignty, constituted by autonomous individuals (and an 'enchanted' self), that gave rise to an image of community enacted in public through affect and devotion. It was here that the autonomy of the individual—juxtaposed against social pressures and interests—was symbolically dramatized, even as new visions of public community, including 'national' community, **(p.331)** were created. And yet it was this very image of community (enacted in a public world) that potentially operated on the individual conscience to limit the voter's freedom of choice in the voting booth. Voting was central to the creation of Pakistan (and of an independent India)—and yet the very process also seemed to challenge popular sovereignty's foundations, as the large number of election petitions charging 'religious undue influence' during the Muslim League's campaign for Pakistan in the 1946 elections suggested.¹³

Still, the distinction between 'religious' community and 'national' community—as moral entities defined by notions of autonomous selfhood—is important, and would certainly merit close attention in comparing the operation of the 'people's sovereignty' in India and Pakistan. In fact, it has sometimes been argued that it was precisely the territorial objectification of the nation (in contrast to the unbounded territoriality of religious community) that proved critical to the nation's historical development as a moral alternative to religious community, as it made possible the establishment of the territorialized 'nation state' as a fixed administrative and legal form for containing the contradictions between freedom of choice and the claims of community inherent in popular sovereignty.¹⁴ The ideal of fixed 'national' citizenship put the national community itself, in theory, beyond the realm of choice, thus freeing the sovereign voter to exercise free choice within. But if this is true, it is important to note that the territorial nation state was in no way capable of containing these contradictions *fully*, as election cases (and public debate) focused on both religious and national symbols since 1947 have amply illustrated.¹⁵

(p.332) Recurring elections, one might argue, represent instead a continual redramatization of popular sovereignty's conundrums. They represent an enactment of the people's sovereignty, constituted by the millions of voters,

symbolically separated from society in the voting booth, exercising their inner autonomous choice in secrecy, even as their choices have publicly shaped (and been shaped by) all of society's conflicting identities and interests. To be within a worldly community, but also to stand outside it—the original conundrum of kingly sovereignty—has taken its place as an irresolvable conundrum also in the politics of voting. As I have argued here, this has been intimately related too to changing ideas about religion, about the sacred and the mundane, about the old problem of conceptualizing the operation of divinity in the world, as immanent and yet never losing its transcendent meaning. Religion—and particularly religious community—has come to pose one of the most difficult problems for theorists of popular sovereignty (and for the law of voting). This is why questions of religion—and the meanings of secularism—have continued to be debated as central (and in some ways insoluble) questions for democracy. Structures of religious thinking and religious reform have played a central role from the beginning in shaping the emerging meanings attached to the concept of the 'people's sovereignty'—in the process also reshaping the meanings of 'religion' itself.

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(p.335) Whyte, J.H. 1960. 'The Influence of the Catholic Clergy on Elections in Nineteenth-Century Ireland'. *English Historical Review* 75: 245–9.

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Notes:

⁽¹⁾ There is of course a huge literature on the rise of popular consent in Europe, and this paragraph hardly engages with it, nor does most writing focus specifically on questions relating to the conundrums of sovereignty. But for a good discussion of the emergence of 'popular sovereignty' in the Anglo-American context, which explains how the vision of the 'king's two bodies' inflected, at least in part, an emerging notion of the 'people's two bodies', see Morgan (1988).

⁽²⁾ Such a vision of the individual as simultaneously within society, and yet defined by an essence setting him apart from it, can be found with a variety of nuances in nineteenth-century social theorists. See, for example, Durkheim (1973, 149–63).

⁽³⁾ This is of course not to suggest that the secret ballot was introduced first in Britain, which it was not. It was in fact widely known as the 'Australian ballot'.

⁽⁴⁾ This was perhaps most famously laid out in John Stuart Mill's comments on the dangers of open public voting in 1850:

The unfortunate voter is in the hands of some opulent man; the opulent man informs him how he must vote. Conscience, virtue, moral obligation, religion all cry to him that he ought to consult his own judgment, and faithfully follow its dictates. The consequences of pleasing, or offending, the opulent man stare him in the face; the oath is violated, the moral obligation is disregarded, a faithless, a prostitute, a pernicious vote is given.

(quoted in Park 1931, 52).

In later writing, Mill turned against the secret ballot, arguing that a vote was a trust and therefore should be cast in public; see Lever (2007, 354–78).

⁽⁵⁾ Parnell was the Irish nationalist who led the parliamentary party favouring Irish home rule in 1880s, who was later accused of adultery, and was bitterly opposed by the Catholic Church. E.L.L. Hammond, who wrote a manual for Indian election tribunals on these matters, recommended this Irish case as

providing a clear example of rhetoric that crossed the line into corruption: 'Parnellism is nothing better than heresy in its teaching; it is immoral and condemned by the Irish Bishop of the Catholic Church, and I would approach the death-bed of a profligate and drunkard with greater confidence than a dying Parnellite. Any woman that sympathises with Parnellism is worse than an abandoned woman' (Hammond 1920, 104).

(⁶) For one account of this, and its relationship to the comparative study of 'world religions', see Masuzawa (2005).

(⁷) Catherine Adcock deals with some of these issues in her discussion of the vision of internal moral control (related to *brahmacharya*) that came to be central to the image among some twentieth-century Arya Samajis of the self-controlled citizen, capable of resisting external corruption. Yet she also notes the contradictions inherent in Arya Samaj projections of such an image, both in relationship to their pedagogical campaigns aimed at 'untouchables', and their projection of Muslims as the antithesis of such a vision. See Adcock (2007).

(⁸) SherAli Tareen has recently critiqued Robinson's views, though Tareen's work highlights at the same time the critical role of a critique of custom, and of corruption (and the meaning of *bid'a*, or innovation), as an arena in which competing nineteenth-century Indian religious scholars sought to redefine the relationship of individual moral judgment to the world (Tareen 2009, 521–52).

(⁹) The point that colonial reform movements among Muslims have important precolonial roots in the eighteenth century has most recently been made by M. Reza Pirbhai in his analysis of changes in Islamic law. The Waliullahi tradition is the central focus of his argument that shifts often credited to colonialism have earlier eighteenth-century links to 'the rise of capitalists, political fragmentation [and] cultural regionalism ...' (Pirbhai 2008, 46–63).

(¹⁰) While Turner's critique has some substance, he ignores almost completely Hodgson's vision of the history of Islam as deeply embedded in (and central to) world history, one of the most compelling appeals of Hodgson's work. Turner's citations relating to the historicizing of conscience are themselves entirely Eurocentric and make no reference to Islam (or to its own intellectual impact on this history). In fact, his critique of Hodgson may also be related to larger debates about whether historians of religion should ground their analyses in the world views of the believers themselves, a debate in which Turner is clearly on the 'societal', objectifying (and Marxist) side. For this perspective, see McCutcheon (1995, 291–3).

(¹¹) Though individual conversion was possible, birth was by far the most important determinant of census categorization of religious communities.

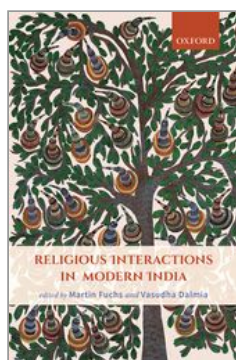
(¹²) See Gilmartin (1991, 123–40). One might note, as Daechsel does, the contradictions built into a politics of unfettered individual autonomy that often produced, paradoxically, an ethos of complete obedience to a community leader. But the paradox is explained by the fact that such leaders gained recognition less on their effective representation of the community's 'interests' than on their ability to embody—and thus call forth affective identification with—the community as a moral ideal. It was the leader's pure and freely chosen, 'selfless' (that is, not rationally calculated) commitment to the idea of community that thus came to bind him to, and provide an example for, his followers.

(¹³) For an analysis of election posters from this campaign in the Punjab, see Gilmartin (2009, 409–23).

(¹⁴) Many scholars have written on the 'objectified', territorial creation of the idea of 'nation'. See, for example, Goswami (2004). But it is also important to note that the distinctive imagining of the modern nation has usually been closely aligned also with the imagining of a sovereign 'people' lying underneath.

(¹⁵) Even images of Gandhi as a symbol of the nation have produced litigation within the frame of electoral undue influence. See, for example, *Desai Basawaraj v. Dasankop Hasansab and others*, 4 ELR 380 (1953), 'where a picture of the bust of Mahatma Gandhi with folded hands was put up on the same board on which the words "Vote for Dasankop" were written, making it appear that Mahatma Gandhi was himself appealing with folded hands to vote for the respondent (Dasankop)'. The tribunal held in this case that this was a minor corrupt practice.

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Dalit Liberative Identity as Amalgam

Kerala's Pulaya Christians and Communist Movement in the Mid-Twentieth Century

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Abstract and Keywords

The chapter discusses post-conversion experiences and struggles of Dalits who had opted for Christianity, taking the case of Pulayas in Kerala, who had become members of the Anglican Church during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The change of religion led to new self-assessment and identity-seeking. Pulayas had major conflicts with Syrian Christians, including Christian landlords. Many Pulayas had then still the status of bonded labourers or even slaves (*adiyan*). After covering the early twentieth-century agitations to overcome their social degradation and exclusion from public spaces, the author focuses on the later involvement of Christian Pulayas with the Communist mobilization. Communist activists accepted water and food from the Pulayas. Finally, the chapter discusses the push of Pulaya Christians for a distinctive depressed-class administration within the Anglican Church, ending with the break-away of a large section of Dalit Christians from the Anglican Church and the start of a new church, the CMS Church, in 1968.

Keywords: Dalit Christians, Christianity, Pulayas, Anglican Church, Syrian Christians, Christian landlords, Communist activists, CMS Church

In everyday life, Pulaya Christians worked as agricultural labourers alongside non-Christian Pulayas and other Dalits in the former princely state of Travancore in Kerala. They maintained their Christian identity alongside their customary client relationship to the land-owning Syrian Christians and Nairs, who engaged

their services as agricultural labourers. However, despite their Christian identity, their commitment to active participation in Church life, and their assertion of a higher position in the interdependent village social hierarchy above their *jati* (caste) counterparts, between the 1940s and the 1960s Pulaya Christians were strongly influenced and played an active role in the Communist movement in Kerala. As was the case with other Dalit groups, their involvement in the movement changed the character of their struggle against the high castes and resulted in significant sociocultural changes and shifts in self-perceptions about their own identity. The aim of this chapter is to evaluate the nature of their involvement in this movement and to analyse it in relation to the multiple identities that they were dealing with in their **(p.337)** post-conversion phase: their Christian, Dalit/Pulaya, and Communist identities.¹ This focus has been triggered particularly by the most recent debates among Kerala's Marxist intellectuals regarding their approach to identity politics in the region (Idayilam 2010).² A more careful analysis of the Pulaya Christian experience—an experience that forced Pulayas to contend with complex issues of identity politics and cross-cutting identities—may provide no easy resolution to these debates.

My chapter is an effort to look at the experience of the Pulayas during the mid-twentieth century, when they were most challenged to deal with a multiplicity of identities: their *jati* identity politics, the class-based Communist movement that they choose to be part of as a vehicle of transformation, as well as the Christian Church, to which they held on tenaciously, despite the fact that the Church was in a struggle against the Communist movement and that most of their oppressive landlords were the dominant members of that very Church. This has to be read in the present context of the intense recent academic and political debate about whether the left movement impeded the emerging Dalit identity at a time when they were at the threshold of real transformative change in their effort for a liberative identity.

Two historical realities regarding the Pulaya Christians are relevant in this discussion. The first is their large-scale conversion to Anglican Christianity during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a result of the Church Missionary Society's evangelization, opportunities for educational mobility (see Oommen 2007), and most importantly their effort to attain an identity distinct from their Pulaya *jati* counterparts. This was encouraged by missionaries and Syrian Christian evangelist teachers and aimed at social transformation and **(p.338)** dignified treatment from high castes. As elsewhere, this involved concentrated effort to acquire human dignity and education.³ Pulaya Christians' effort to opt out of Hinduism and affiliate themselves with Christianity was not just an opting out of a hierarchy, but they were also seeking a distinct identity and social mobility as ex-untouchables.⁴

Second, their post-conversion struggle focused on dealing with their identity as Pulaya Christians/Dalit Christians within a Church that was dominated by high-caste Syrian Christians, who had a Brahminic air in their attitudes and values. This was typified by their reinforcement of their Pulaya identity, rather than following the urgings of their missionaries, who wanted them to forget their 'heathen' pasts. They also rejected similar attempts by Syrian Christians to 'Syrianize' them.

During the initial stages of the Christianization process, Pulaya converts hoped for a socio-ritual status change within Kerala society and were actively involved in the missionary fight against discriminatory caste separations within the Church during the second half of nineteenth century. But the success of Syrian Christian efforts to sustain caste separation within Christianity functioned as a watershed experience for the Pulaya Christians. Education and colonial influences created a conflict between the Hindu value system of pollution and the Pulaya Christian search for a humanizing existence. Pulayas came to realize that caste exclusiveness was neither being eliminated nor softened by Christianity. Consequently, the Pulaya Christian caste identity was intensified following conversion.

During the second phase, through the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham (SJPS), which was established under the revolutionary leadership of Ayyankali in 1907, Pulaya Christians led or participated in violent uprisings and agitations with the aim of overcoming such prohibitions as the ban on their entering government schools, walking **(p.339)** on public roads, and removing the marks of caste degradation. In fact, the Central Travancore Pulaya Caste Association was a predominantly Pulaya Christian self-assertion movement. Their active participation and leadership shaped the association's programmes and priorities. Better educated and more assertive than the other Pulayas, Pulaya Christians also were active in the Legislative Assembly of Travancore. The Pulaya Christian experience shows that not only were they involved in and led self-assertive caste movements in solidarity with their caste fellows, but they also abandoned any hope of an ascent in the caste hierarchy. Instead, they embraced their caste identity.

Koji Kawashima's observations in his study of Travancore society and the role of missionaries that low-caste converts were not been partakers or contributors in 'substantial movements' is highly questionable and needs scholarly revision (Kawashima 1998, 160, 170-1). In a sense, Kawashima's conclusion only resonates with the general perception, including Ambedkar's, that Dalit Christians did not have any significant contribution to make either to their own caste community or to the liberation of Dalits in general once they were converted to Christianity (Ambedkar 1989, 470-3). In fact, the story of the growing Dalit consciousness in Kerala, which might be called a process of Dalitization, cannot be considered without taking into account the creative and

the articulate resolve of Dalit Christian converts. For these converts, the post-conversion experience was a time of real self-assessment and identity-seeking. They searched for and came to terms with their Pulayaness, and consequently with their Dalit identity, in this process.⁵ We need to delve further into this identity-seeking mechanism to understand its depth during their interactions with the Communist movement during the mid-twentieth century.

In the 1940s, when the Communist movement in the former Travancore region of Kerala began to make inroads among the Dalits, particularly among Pulayas, two particular vacuities came into sight (**p.340**) for the Pulaya Christians. One was the gradual fading of the effectiveness of the Pulaya caste associations and its leadership. Second was the disappearance of the Anglican missionary patrons. It was in this context that the Communist mobilization of agricultural workers allowed Pulaya Christians to continue shaping their identity based on social transformation.

One of the significant developments in the early years of the Communist movement in Travancore was the founding of the Travancore Karshaka Thozhilaly Union (TKTU or Travancore Agricultural Labourers Union) in 1940. It was part of a broader movement of Communist politicization that was taking shape in other non-agricultural sectors in the 1930s (Jeffrey 1984). These developments had an effect on the agricultural labourers of central Travancore, especially in the paddy-growing coastal area called Kuttanad.

The TKTU played a crucial role in organizing the resistance to exploitative practices and protecting the victims from atrocities wherever possible. From the early 1950s, local uprisings of agricultural labourers began to follow a definite pattern, which continued over many years.⁶ The labourers became increasingly involved in direct conflict with high-caste landlords instead of with the police. Further, these struggles between the Pulaya, Paraya, and Izhava castes, on the one side, and the Nair and Syrian Christian landlords, on the other, concentrated on issues of wages, working hours, and the right of the labourers to retain their jobs even when 'dismissed' by landlords who suspected them of Communist sympathies.

During this period of struggle, a new relationship was emerging between high-caste Communist activists, who were mainly young radicals, and the poor low-caste labourers. During the 1940s, a significant number of youngsters belonging to the dominant landlord castes had been attracted to the Communist ideology. Many of them were forced underground between 1948 and 1952 in response to police atrocities, raids, and the threat of arrest. During these times, Pulaya labourers protected these young Communists in their small huts. In some cases, those protected were the sons of their own landlords, who continued to harass the Pulayas for their association with the Communist movement. This interaction created a bond, sometimes (**p.341**) a deeply emotional one, between these

high-caste Communist leaders and the low-caste Pulayas.⁷ It was these high-caste youngsters and agricultural labourers who stood together and challenged the atrocities of the landlords against the lower class labourers in central Travancore.

The outcomes of these developments in the 1950s were twofold. First, a large number of Pulaya and Paraya agricultural labourers began to be drawn into the Communist Party as active supporters, or as 'anubhavies' (sympathizers). Many of them began to feel that the Communist Party of India (CPI) was their party and that the Travancore Congress was pro-landlord. Second, the help and support of Communist activists generated a trust between the leaders and the low castes. Many Pulayas and other low castes in the paddy-growing areas of central Travancore, as T.K. Oommen observes, 'started to perceive the CPI as their party and the comrades who fraternized with them as their saviours' during this period (Oommen 1985, 97).

This CPI-supported activism resulted in a virtual break down of the traditional '*adiyan*'—landlord or patron-client system of relationships between the high-caste landlords and the low-caste agricultural labourers. This gave way to something akin to a contractual relationship. As a result, low castes refused to fulfil humiliating or exploitative customary obligations and were ready to forgo existing privileges the patronage system offered. Further, the Communist movement's activities during this period among the Pulayas and Paraya castes began to be based on caste issues rather than purely economic or 'class' issues.⁸

Agricultural Labourers' Union Movement

In the 1950s, a high proportion of the Pulaya Christians engaged in traditional Pulaya occupations. In certain localities within central Travancore, more than 80 per cent were agricultural labourers (Alexander 1977, 62).⁹ They were mostly landless, living on the properties of their landlords with the customary right of cultivating the little **(p.342)** land that they had around their huts. Many Pulayas were in perpetual debt to their landlords and so became a kind of peonage for these landlord families. Thus, they were part and parcel of the local agrarian society, living alongside other Pulayas, who were mostly their kin, and other low castes such as Parayas and Kuravas. The Agricultural Labourers' Union Movement initiated by the Communist Party in the 1940s was slow to attract support from among the Pulaya Christians. Landlords considered support of the labourers' union to be an attempt to defy traditional authority.

Despite their landlords' opposition, Pulaya Christians in certain areas responded well to the TKTU (Oommen 1985, 71). In the early 1940s, when many of the low-caste workers were hesitant about openly joining Communist-led activities, Pulaya Christians took a lead in the movement. Other low-caste agricultural labourers, as several early initiatives show, did not match the courage many Pulaya Christians showed in defying their landlords in this fashion. One of the

earliest instances was the confrontation which took place in 1943 between the agricultural labourers of adiyar (bonded) status and the landlords in Kuttanad, in Alleppey district, involving sixteen Pulaya Christians belonging to the Anglican Church. They were all labourers who had been attached to four prominent landowning families for generations. The confrontation occurred when these Pulaya Christians realized that the landlord families were exploiting them over their annual harvest payments. The practice of lending a few *paras* (a local measurement equivalent to roughly twelve litres) of paddy as an advance payment by the landlord at the beginning of the year kept the labourers in constant debt. Also, the landlords always kept the accounts. The sixteen Pulaya Christians approached the local Communist Party union leaders, who agreed to act on their behalf. The Communist Party leaders confronted the landlords with the labourers' complaints, and threatened strike action if the accounts of the annual payments were not re-examined. All sixteen Pulaya Christians received several more *paras* of paddy in compensation as a result of the negotiations (Tharamangalam 1981, 72–3). This unprecedented success stimulated similar initiatives within other Pulaya Christian congregations.

The newly developing links with the labourer union were further demonstrated by the active participation of the Pulaya Christians **(p.343)** in the famous Punnappra–Vayalar rebellion of 1946.¹⁰ According to Pulaya members of the Anglican congregation in Thakazhy, a significant number of families from the region were sympathetic to the rebellion and many played an active part. Two Pulaya Christians of the Thakazhy congregation lost their lives in the confrontation with the police.¹¹ Several Pulaya Christian families fled temporarily from the area to nearby villages. The repression suffered by the Pulaya Christians (including police atrocities—beating, burning of houses, and rape) led to a closer interaction between them and the union.¹²

Pulaya Christian initiatives in the 1940s were the very opposite of the traditional master–bonded labour relations in the paddy belt. Such confrontations increased the prestige of and support for the Communist movement not only among Pulaya Christians but also among other subordinate castes with whom the Pulaya Christians were in close contact, especially in the Tiruvella, Changanacherry, and Mavelikara regions.

The most significant element in this politicization was the Pulaya Christian initiation of their caste fellows into a process that closely resembled the Pulaya caste assertion movements of the 1920s and 1930s. The sense of caste solidarity was in full play during these initiatives, even after several generations of their conversion. This was also an emotionally charged journey back to their days of dispossession and deprivation as an Untouchable caste group, invoking stories of 'slavery' and victimization due to the caste hierarchy.

Political Education

The Communist Party used several forms of political education to mobilize different sections of the low castes including study classes **(p.344)** and the distribution of written pamphlets, magazines, books, short stories, and novels by progressive writers such as Thakazhi, Basheer, Kesavadev, and Varkey on themes of exploitation. There were also plays which adopted revolutionary themes, depicting the suffering of the agricultural labourers and the Communists who fought for justice. Thoppil Bhasi's plays, *Puthiya Akasam* *Puthiya Bhoomi* (New Heaven and New Earth), *Ningalenne Communistaki* (You Made Me a Communist), and *Mooladhanam* (Capital) were particularly popular in the 1950s. Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, one of the most prominent Malayalam novelists, wrote *Randitangazhi* (Two Measures of Rice) in 1947, which vividly portrayed the sufferings of the Kuttanad Pulaya agricultural labourers. Pulayas figured in the novel as victims of the 'janmi-adiyan' (patron-client) system, suffering under perpetual debt due to the ruthlessness of the landlords (see Pillai 1988, 83-90).

The cultural activities made a considerable impact on Pulaya Christians, encouraging them to question the status quo and stand up for their rights. Pulaya Christians who attended these plays remember that they were exciting to watch plays that portrayed Pulayas as having a significant role in a society, a society that hitherto had treated them as 'nobodies'.¹³

A considerable number of Pulaya Christians in Travancore were familiar with the printed literature distributed by the Communist Party. They bought and read small versions of the Communist Manifesto enthusiastically. Small groups of Pulaya Christians discussed, interpreted, and studied Communist 'adharsam' (ideology), and the literate among them read newspapers and pamphlets to the local people in small tea shops or Pulaya huts (see Schoenfeld 1959, 239).¹⁴ Although there is no evidence of the use of church property or buildings for Communist activities, Christian-Communist networks seem to have facilitated Communist activities wherever Pulaya Christians dominated the local Dalit population. This created a strong core of Pulaya Christian activists who supported the trade union movement: church wardens, 'moopens' or elders of the community, and, in isolated cases, also evangelists (see Abraham 1977, 83; Oommen 1985, 179).

(p.345) It is difficult to measure the extent to which Pulaya Christians internalized the Communist ideology from an intellectual point of view. However, a new vocabulary with new concepts was being acquired and popularly used by Pulaya Christians. Words such as *muthalali* (capitalist) for the landlord, *thozhilali* (worker) referring to labourers, *vargum* and *varga-samaram* (class and class struggle respectively) for landlord-tenant-worker relations, and *chooshanam* (exploitation) became part of their everyday language.¹⁵ It is also significant that Pulaya Christians used these words to refer not only to the existing agrarian

relationship, but also to the situation within the Anglican Church, especially in relation to Syrian Christian domination. Numerous pamphlets and handbills printed by Anglican Pulaya Christians during the 1950s and early 1960s directly used this new militant vocabulary.¹⁶

Simple Living Example

Between 1948 and 1952, the Travancore government banned Communist Party activities, and hundreds of Communist leaders went underground to avoid arrest and harassment by the police. Several activists were imprisoned. After release, many led an 'ascetic' life during the 1950s, devoting their efforts to the promotion of the party.¹⁷ **(p.346)** Combined with the resilience the Communist leaders displayed in the face of police repression and brutality, their lifestyle demonstrated 'the depth of their convictions' to the villagers (Nossiter 1982, 93). Many of them lived and slept in Pulaya and other low-caste huts, and shared their meagre diet. The identification of the Communist high-caste leaders with the poor Untouchables including the Pulaya Christians created a long-lasting, positive impression of the party and its leaders. Several Pulaya Christian families were part of the tight local village network that provided secret shelters for Communist leaders, carried secret messages in times of crisis, provided safe passage to escape police surveillance, and contributed food to support Communist Party workers.¹⁸

Apart from affording refuge to the fugitive underground Communists, the Pulaya Christians' conversation and village gossip reflected their partiality towards the CPI.¹⁹ There was widespread agreement among the Pulaya Christians that Communist leaders were self-sacrificing and trustworthy. On the other hand, church leaders, especially Syrian Christian priests, were considered guilty of hypocrisy. These priests, most of whom would not enter a Pulaya Christian home or even accept a glass of water from them, were no match for such 'legendary' Communist leaders. There were stories of sacrifices made by E.M.S Namboodiripad, a Brahmin, and his readiness to eat in the 'Pulaya *kudils*' or huts. This made many Pulaya Christians question the 'casteism' of the Christian leaders.²⁰ According to Interviewee 3, who was a church warden and a member of the CPI in the 1950s, several Pulaya Christians felt that Communists did as Syrian Christian priests ought to have done, but rarely did in spite of Pulaya Christians being fellow Christians.²¹

(p.347) The systematic efforts of the Communist Party, its encouragement of unionization through the TKTU, and its cultivation of a positive image amongst the Pulaya Christians brought results. The CPI was able to channel the suppressed anti-landlordism and anti-casteism into support for the union. As a result, Pulaya Christians came to believe that the Communist Party was 'their party' and meant for the poor. By 1961, more than 80 per cent of the Pulaya labourers were members or supporters of the union in some areas of central Travancore (Alexander 1973, 1553). During the 1950s, the Communist Party

made enormous advances, and a considerable number of Pulaya Christians participated in the union and its activities. By this time, Pulaya Christians had come to accept Communism as a vehicle to express their defiance of landlords and assert their rights.

Pulaya Christians' Response

How do we explain this response of the Pulaya Christians to the Communist Party's efforts to unionize labourers? One of the main reasons the Communist movement was successful was that a relatively high proportion of Pulaya Christians were literate. This meant that they were able to access CPI writings first hand.²² The lower classes were drawn into this culture of literacy and education, as exemplified by the Pulaya Christians themselves. In the 1931 census, 11 per cent of the Pulaya Christians of Travancore were literate, in the sense that they had had at least four years of school education. The literacy rate among their non-Christian counterparts was only 3 per cent (Kannan 1988, 131).²³ The higher rate of literacy among the Pulaya Christians made them receptive to the Communist ideas more than any other Dalit groups (Joseph 1938, 79). In fact, as they became better educated and informed, Pulaya Christians were able to play a crucial role in the spread of Communist influence among their own people as well as among other lower castes. A number of prominent Communist leaders of Dalit background in Kerala were Pulaya Christians.

(p.348) We should be cautious, however, against overestimating this increased literacy as the basis of a deep ideological sympathy between Pulaya Christians and Communist ideas. Instead, their relationship with the Communist Party was probably more functional, serving to reach their goals of raising the socio-economic standing of their caste. The same probably goes for their embracing of the 'alien' religion of Christianity.

Nevertheless, we should caution ourselves. To perceive a linkage between the high literacy rates among Pulaya Christians and their attraction to Communism is easy and accurate. But it was not due to Dalit notions of class that caused them to make such a move. It was another negotiation space for them for a better situation in comparison to their previously held notions of and a state of powerlessness. The potency and power of routing their aspirations through a non-Indian religion and their ability to access a political ideology through their own Dalit aspirations and the reshaping of the Communist movement through their myths and rumours which were their own making had less to do with the ideology itself. I want to argue that Communism became a transitory cultural phenomenon which was closer to their earlier notions of equality.

Pulaya Christian support for the Communist movement and the trust in local Communists may also be traced to the 'transfer of power' contemplated at the higher levels of the Church Missionary Society in the 1940s. Discussions were

already taking place regarding the transference of leadership of the Travancore-Cochin diocese to the indigenous people. Syrian Christians were the apparent choice to take over the leadership from the missionaries. From the 1930s onwards, Anglican missionaries played a less important role in the social improvement of Pulaya Christians, due to the increasing power of the caste self-assertion movements. However, missionaries of the Church Missionary Society continued to function as mediators and patrons within the Church, which continued to be dominated by Syrian Christians. Pulaya Christians, therefore, felt that missionaries should continue to act on their behalf (Mathai 1961, 26). In 1941, when the Pulaya Christians demanded the establishment of a distinctive depressed class administration within the Anglican Church, they requested that it should be under an English missionary and not a Syrian Christian. Stuart Smith, a Church **(p.349)** Missionary Society's missionary, was prevailed upon to preside over the committee composed of Dalits and high-caste Christians, which was formed to negotiate on the question of administration.²⁴ In a letter to Corfield, the last English bishop of the diocese, a group of Pulaya Christian leaders wrote as follows: 'We are afraid that an Indian will not be very helpful to our communities and to the diocese at this stage. We would request the C.M.S not to make any such innovation in the near future.' Nevertheless, in 1945 C.K. Jacob, an Anglican priest from a prominent Syrian family in Kottayam, was appointed as the first Indian bishop of the diocese. This created considerable apprehension among many Dalit Christians (Mathai 1961, 7). Pulaya Christian support for the Communist movement and the trust that they placed in local Communist leaders can be seen as a way of coming to terms with the shift that was taking place within the Anglican Church. Feeling somewhat betrayed and left in the hands of Syrian Christians, Pulaya Christians aligned themselves with the Communists to fill the vacuum left by missionaries; Dalit Christians found among Communists a newfound ally more reliable than the Syrian Christians.

Pulaya Christians also probably found themselves more at home in the Communist movement from the 1940s onwards because it seemed to open an alternative to the caste-based self-assertion movements of the early decades that had decelerated and became dysfunctional by that period. The division of the Pulaya caste associations into several sub-caste and other splinter associations such as the All Travancore Pulaya Mahasabha, the Cheramar Hindu Mahasabha, and the Kizhaka Pulaya Mahasabha reduced their effectiveness in demanding rights for their members, and also reduced the solidarity between members. Internal conflicts between Pulaya leaders such as Keshavan Sastri and A. Sivadas further weakened the movement (Chentharassery 1989, 111-14).

Ultimately, Pulaya Christians' embrace of unionization by the Communist movement, and gradually the political party itself, was born out of a desire for a dignified social space in the village and society at large.

(p.350) The 1957 Election Campaign

During the 1957 election, Syrian Christian community leaders tried to convince Dalit Christians that they should vote for Congress rather than the CPI. However, defying such directions and campaign Pulaya Christians largely supported CPI candidates as a continuation of their activism in the unionization process which preceded the election.

A major contributing factor in the 1957 electoral success of the Communist Party among Pulaya Christians was their ability to address a number of issues close to the hearts of Pulaya Christians. The campaign emphasized the rights of the agricultural labourers, in particular the need for the removal of the age-old practice of 'slavery', as they called the customary relationship between the low castes and the landlords.²⁵ Exploitation on the basis of 'untouchability' and the associated custom of total devotion to the landlord families as well as the need for a minimum wage and land distribution were key themes in the CPI campaign.²⁶ It also addressed Dalit Christian concerns about their identity, and offered practical solutions to a number of problems, such as fee concessions for students. The party's key policy document, the *Communist Manifesto of 1957* (in Malayalam), also included the 'Backward Class Christians' in the same category as the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes. In other words, the party claimed that Dalit Christians deserved the same privileges as those already guaranteed in the constitution for Scheduled Castes and Tribes. The CPI promised immediate action in this matter if they came to power, and subsequent research has shown that these promises in relation to the caste disabilities had a considerable impact on the way in which Dalit Christians voted in the 1957 elections.²⁷ In short, the **(p.351)** CPI reiterated the idea that the position of the Dalit Christians was identical and closely linked to that of others from the same caste. This was a timely message to Pulaya Christians who envisaged solidarity within the Pulaya group and were involved in raising Pulaya caste pride during the 1950s.

The Communist Government, 1957-8

When the Communist Party assumed office in 1957, the ministry immediately reiterated and promptly began the process of implementing the promises made to the Dalit Christians and other lower castes.²⁸ However, many of the Pulaya Christians concentrated on what they considered were the three principal achievements of the first Communist ministry in 1957: a minimum wage for agricultural labourers, granting of the right to occupy hutment sites, and relaxation of abusive and supercilious behaviour on the part of the upper castes. The last was a direct consequence of the first two governmental measures. The ministry put a stop to all evictions of agricultural labourers from their dwelling sites and introduced the Agrarian Relations Bill (Namboodiripad 1957, 9). Although these measures were also aimed at protecting the interests of the tenant farmers, and though the famous Agrarian Relations Bill known as the Kerala Land Reforms Amendment received presidential assent only in 1969,

Communist Party workers exhorted hutment dwellers to exercise their occupation rights and stick to their dwelling-holdings in the face of compulsion. The party pledged its full moral support to them. Many, including Pulaya Christians, followed these directions (Jose 1984).

Response to the 'Vimochana Samaram'

Opposition to the Communist government during their two-year rule culminated in the famous '*vimochana samaram*', or 'liberation struggle', of 1959. In a display of unusual unity, non-Communist political parties, leaders of Nair Service Society (NSS, a Nair community organization), church leaders, and Syrian Christians were active in the struggle. Mass arrests and police actions followed. 150,000 people **(p.352)** were arrested, 10,000 imprisoned, and 17 were killed in police firings. Bowing to the pressure of the movement, the central government intervened and dismissed the Namboodiripad Communist Ministry.²⁹

Here again, it is important to see how the Syrian Christians and church leaders were involved in the 'liberation struggle' in order to fully understand the Pulaya Christian response to the agitation. Syrian Christians and several bishops reinforced the anti-Communist movement through the print media, pastoral letters, and direct participation in agitation (see Nayar 1966, 188–9).³⁰ Church leaders, Syrian Christian community leaders and, more significantly, pro-Congress Pulaya Christian leaders made direct appeals to all Pulaya and other Dalit Christians, calling upon them to participate actively in the liberation struggle to remove the Communist 'evil' from the state of Kerala.³¹ However, there is no evidence to suggest that rank-and-file Pulaya Christians followed their church leaders; they do not appear to have participated to any significant degree in the struggle anywhere in central Travancore. On the other hand, Pulaya Christian leaders themselves acknowledged that Pulaya and other Dalit Christians opposed the liberation struggle.³²

What concerned many Pulaya Christians during the 1959 agitation was that the Syrian Christians dubbed them 'Communists', which was seen as a pejorative label. Although many of the Pulaya Christians were proud of being Communists, they were not happy with the disparaging way in which their fellow Syrian Christian church members used the term. Several confessed in interviews that denigration of their leftist sympathies, together with the indirect and direct taunting to which they were subjected had the effect of driving them closer to the CPI.³³ An important development during this period that further alienated Pulaya Christians and contributed to their participation in the CPI resistance to the liberation struggle was the organized violence unleashed by the Syrian Christian landlords **(p.353)** and other upper castes against all those suspected to have voted for the CPI or favoured the CPI during the liberation struggle.

Syrian Christians attacked several Pulaya Christians and a number of their houses were burnt down.³⁴

There was a strong call for Hindu and Christian Cheramars' (Pulayas) unity. The formation of a Kerala Cheramar (Pulaya) Christian-Hindu Society in September 1959 was the most significant development in this regard. Organizing these meetings, the representative committee of the Society wrote in a pamphlet as follows:

All of you will have heard and experienced the recent political events and the consequent atrocities committed on the backward classes ... Hindus and Christians of the backward classes fell victims to this attack. The violence was not based on religious affiliation, but rather on racial prejudice and caste considerations. ... Let us all, both Hindu and Christian, remember our caste origins and resolutely unite. We should be the masters of our own destiny.³⁵

The fact that the initiative for this move came from Pulaya Christians (mostly Anglican Pulaya Christians), and that it mainly occurred in central Travancore (where Syrian Christian attacks on the Dalit Christians were more frequent and intense than elsewhere) indicates that this movement was a reaction against Syrian Christian victimization of Pulayas for their stand in the 'liberation struggle'.

Christian Identity

Despite their support for the Communist movement and clear rejection of the political preferences of Syrian Christians, Pulaya Christians continued to maintain their affiliation with the Anglican Church, and actively participated in its ritual life and other activities. A 1965 study sponsored by the Church of South India (CSI) Synod concerning the socio-economic and religious difficulties faced by the Pulaya Christians and other low-caste Christians in the Anglican Diocese (the Central Kerala Diocese of the CSI) refers to 'the tenacity **(p.354)** with which they hold to the Church even in the face of major socio-economic difficulties' (Jaysingham 1965, 66).

However, there was a neatly arranged and well-considered space between Communist movement and Church activities. For instance, in certain areas where Pulaya Christians were a dominant group among the lower castes and active in the Communist movement, they insisted that Communist Party and KKTU (formerly TKTU) activities should not take place on Sunday mornings when they were engaged in parish activities. Most of the local party meetings and study classes were organized in such a way so as not to clash with church events, and CPI local leaders appear to have accepted these arrangements.³⁶ For the Pulaya Christians, it was clear that Communism was an extremely useful tool which allowed them to understand and attempt to alter an oppressive situation about which the Church did not seem to have much to say. Further, the party

supported their caste solidarity efforts and above all their continuing resentment at the fault line of Untouchability, which the Church did not.

The reason for the Pulaya Christians' continued attachment to the Anglican Church could be that they did not see Christianity and church structures as necessarily oppressive. It is with a lot of joy that they remember what the Church, especially missionaries, did for their ancestors. In the construction of their history, they mostly associate their conversion with liberation from 'slavery'.³⁷ For example, a history written by a group of Pulaya Christians and other low-caste Christians of the Anglican Church claimed that it was Christianity that convinced them and the upper castes that they were also human beings. They also observed that it was Christianity that offered them literacy and education, and raised their awareness of their rights in society (Joseph, Mathai, and Isaac 1961, 4–5). Moreover, although they clearly recognize the domination and oppressive behaviour of the Syrian Christians within and outside the Church, they did not identify this oppression with Christianity but rather with the Syrian Christian caste character and hierarchy.

(p.355) Two major factors that shaped Pulaya Christian participation in the Communist movement deserve our attention. These factors relate to their status and social mobility, issues with which they have been struggling throughout their history. The first was that the Pulaya Christians had to endure caste segregation and discriminatory behaviour as Syrian Christians continued the practice of Untouchability within the Church.³⁸ Right in the middle of the period of Communist rule, A.C. Joseph, a Pulaya Christian teacher and evangelist of the Anglican Church wrote:

Even now we are 'Christian Pulayan' and 'Christian Parayan' among the Kerala Christians Even 21 years after Hindu temples were opened to Untouchables and Brahmins alike, within Christianity we are symbols of permanent contradiction to Christian morality

If it is impossible to accept human beings as equal while they are alive, how on earth would they be accepted so after their death? ... We are at a loss to comprehend the reasoning behind the considerations of racial differences even in the burial grounds where the rich and the poor enjoy eternal rest on an equal basis³⁹

Second, pastoral care was not available to Pulaya Christians on the same basis as to Syrian Christians. In the church organizations, they had little representation, and in some cases were denied even basic voting rights. Inter-dining and inter-marriage with other communities were rare (see Oommen 2002).

The Impact of the Communist Experience

Pulaya Christians' close association with the Communist movement had repercussions within the Anglican Church. The most significant development was the emergence of a self-assertion movement of the Pulaya Christians and other Dalit Christians in the diocese, which came to be known as the Separate Administration Movement (SAM). The major events and features of the movement demonstrate both the direct and indirect influence of the Communist movement. It was no **(p.356)** coincidence that the call to establish a separate administrative structure within the Anglican Church exclusively for Dalit Christians came in August 1958, during the height of the Communist ministry, when Pulaya Christians were actively involved in the Communist Party.⁴⁰ This was the beginning of a long and highly successful agitation. Demonstrations, public meetings, memoranda, and the publication of literature to inform the Dalit Christians about their rights within the Church followed this meeting. In October 1960, forty-nine Dalit Christian members of the Diocesan Council, the highest democratic body of the diocese, submitted a group resignation to the bishop of the diocese, defiantly demonstrating their resentment of the unjust situation within the Church. They demanded opportunities for 'self-expression' and self-determination and an end to the 'minority rule' of the Syrian Christian community.⁴¹ In the following months of 1961–2, the movement widened its base, receiving the whole-hearted support and participation of eleven ordained ministers from Pulaya and Paraya backgrounds. The support of the clergy and the growth of mass support led to a dramatic turn in SAM's agitation.⁴²

The major features of the SAM clearly manifested the influence of the Communist movement on Dalit Christians, particularly on the Pulaya Christians, who played strong leadership roles in SAM. First, SAM leaders generated a large amount of printed literature, written and produced by the Pulaya Christians and other Dalit Christians. The most significant publication was a magazine named *Drum*, the first issue of which appeared in 1958, which they used to air their demands and grievances.⁴³ Two Pulaya leaders, C.I. Mathai and A.C. Joseph, played a major role in producing their magazine, which appears to have ceased after 1959. This emphasis on the printed word reflected the popular education strategies of the Communist movement of the 1950s.

Second, the use of militant language and concepts borrowed from the Communist movement was very evident in SAM. The rhetorical terms 'adiyan' or 'slave' used by the Communists in their discussion **(p.357)** of agrarian relationships were used to powerful effect to accuse Syrian Christians of trying to perpetuate the age-old 'adiyan' system within the Church. Further they called the Syrian Christians 'capitalists' and described their oppressive relationship as 'class domination' (Joseph, Mathai, and Isaac 1961). In one of the pamphlets they asked, 'Isn't this the old master-slave relationship?... Isn't it the entrenched domineering attitude of the rich, that you can do anything to the

unprivileged...?’⁴⁴ They wrote that they would not continue as ‘untouchable castes’ while dramatic changes were happening outside the Church. They wrote:

It is now well over a century since the Pulayas and Parayas were converted to Christianity. But they are still treated as outcastes. There are separate Churches, cemeteries and even Holy Communion services for Pulayas and Parayas ... Ideas have changed and a new social order started to evolve as Communism, with its sweet dreams of equality, has taken over the reigns of government in Kerala. In spite of these developments it is pathetic to see racist leaders disguised in religious cloaks and monsters who proudly claim to be devout Christians with a dominant role in Christian churches. Awake and organise! Cast off all fear.⁴⁵

The most radical demands were for the elevation of a person from the ex-Untouchable castes to the Bishopric, and the end to the practice of appointing Pulaya and Paraya ministers to Dalit congregations only.⁴⁶

The initial stage of the agitation culminated in a demonstration and public meeting attended by 50,000 Pulaya and Paraya Christians in November 1961.⁴⁷ As a result of the wide attention received by SAM, several studies were commissioned by the Church and Christian organizations which revealed the deplorable position of low castes within the Anglican and other churches in Kerala.⁴⁸ These studies also made reference to the impact of the Communist movement among the Dalit Christians. They perceived the tensions **(p.358)** within the Church as a manifestation of the newly emerging political consciousness of the Pulayas and other Christians. Further, a three-member commission appointed by the synod (the highest executive body) of the CSI in 1965 made several recommendations to improve the situation of Dalits in the Anglican Church (Joseph 1980, 167). The most important of these recommendations was the need to appoint one Dalit Christian to the position of assistant bishop of the diocese. As a result of the recommendations and the mounting pressure of the SAM, several drastic measures were taken immediately (Joseph 1980, 167). T.S. Joseph, a Pulaya minister and SAM leader, was consecrated as the assistant bishop of the Anglican Diocese. His appointment to the bishopric was the symbolic success for the movement within the Church.

However, for some Pulayas, the recommendations of the C.S.I Synod Commission came too late. Even before the commission met, there were signs of a break-away movement under the leadership of V.J. Stephen, an influential Pulaya Christian minister and leader of the SAM who resigned from the Anglican Church in 1964. It received support from a large number of Pulaya and Paraya Christians. The break-away group, namely ‘CMS Church’ (invoking the missionary connection), reflected the degree of frustration Dalits felt over the continued domination of the Syrian Christians in the Anglican Church. In May

1965, they sent a 'memorandum' to the archbishop of Canterbury, signed by 10,000 Dalit Christians. A demonstration, attended in thousands, by the break-away group on 2 January 1965 revealed the significant level of support among Dalit Christians for this move. In an unprecedented and spectacular act of defiance against the Anglican establishment, V.J. Stephen was consecrated bishop in 1966 by a bishop of another Syrian break-away group from the Mar Thomas Church.

Thus, Dalit Christians' desire to change the power structure within the Church does not seem to have succeeded despite the socially assertive identity that they have newly acquired as a result of their association with the Communist movement. However, Christian identity and the religious resources that it bestowed were not something they wanted to abandon. In fact in the post-conversion experience Christian identity appears to be the most tenacious and perennial among their multilateral affiliations.

(p.359) Identity as Amalgam

Thus, this chapter demonstrates the Pulaya Christian community's use of religion, caste, and politics as idioms for social transformation. They did so by creating an amalgam of identities in a highly complex society. Pulaya Christians' interactions with the Communist movement came during a transitional phase in their post-conversion experience. With a conversion to Christianity, Pulayas had intended to create a separate social identity based on Christianity's 'foreign' origins, as well as to emerge from the process of their conversion free from the dominance of high castes. While conversion to Christianity was a crucial passage in the gradual emergence of their liberative identity, it did not provide them with a neat break with their jati as they desired, nor did it fully free them from high-caste dominance. What it did was to create a sense of dignity and form the roots of a movement towards social empowerment, especially through education and not necessarily an identity.⁴⁹

However, it was with the arrival of the Communist movement that Pulaya Christians' goals towards social empowerment were fulfilled. Communism added a greater activist thrust to their movement, and provided them with stronger concepts about liberative identity. This liberative identity, it should be noted, did not emerge out of a rejection of their Pulaya past. Instead, it challenged them to balance the emotional attraction of the new Communist political ideology with the Dalit identity, which was based on a common consciousness of past marginalization and dispossession.

The combined influence of both Communism and Christianity is apparent in the formation of the Pulaya identity, which was created as part of an ongoing process of wider social transformation. What is most significant in this process was that Dalit Christians, who were historically considered a marginalized group within the wider Dalit community, initiated this process, thus playing a

transformative role **(p.360)** in the life of their non-Christian Dalit counterparts. This process of going 'back' to their past identity by aligning themselves with their non-Christian caste counterparts through the Communist movement is clearly not an indication of an acceptance of existing caste hierarchies. Instead, it was an effort to accept their caste categorization and make it a source of further advancement, and a Dalit liberative identity emerged in that process.

It is also important to note that, despite their inability to achieve their social goals through conversion, at no point do Pulaya Christians disown Christianity or the Church. Christianity continues to play a vital role in their process of self-assertion. It forms a continuous strand of association, while their association with the Communist movement was more transient, though Communism added a greater ideological thrust to their movement. Pulaya Christians did not question what Christianity offered them. Instead, they questioned the internal structural contradictions and legacies of caste prejudice that remained within the Church, using Communism as a tool to achieve these ends. Indeed, studies of the role of religions in Dalit life and transformation, as in Juergensmeyer's *Religion as Social Vision*, very clearly demonstrate that Dalits saw Christian conversion as a major vision for liberation because of their perception that 'fundamental divisions in society are religious. This implies that change in the social order will also have to have a religious character, hence the new religions of Untouchables'.⁵⁰

Thus, Pulaya Christians were engaged in a long and complex journey to escape from caste-based atrocities. They did so through religious conversion and, later, by appropriating an ideological movement to their advantage. They shaped the Communist movement according to religio-cultural idioms that were conducive to their notions of social change, without sacrificing their new advantageous religious identity.⁵¹

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Notes:

(¹) This chapter is part of a larger study on the Pulaya encounter with Christianity, caste, and Communism by the author.

(²) There is a widely held idea among the Dalit movements and its leaders that the left are the main enemy to movements of the subalterns (*keezhala munnetam*). The main plank on which these movements come together is, in fact, this sense of this solidarity in opposition to Leftist-Marxists (Idayilam 2010, 46). Marxists are making a distinction between identity politics based on religious beliefs and Dalit/subaltern movements recently.

(³) For a comprehensive pan-Indian experience of the Dalit conversion, especially the motives at work, see Webster (2009). See also Kim (2003). Dalit conversions are dealt in detail in Bauman (2008); Cox (2002); Dube (2004); for Christian identity and Dalits, see Harding (2008).

(⁴) In comparison, the Thiyyas of Malabar (and perhaps Izhavas of Travancore) were seeking to move upwards within a social hierarchy. See Menon (1994, 63).

(⁵) In the varying visions of change among the Dalits of Punjab, Ad Dharm was popular among Chamars whereas Christianity gained popularity among Chuhars. However, by the 1930s, they both entered into a political alliance for the sake of Dalit advancement. Mangoo Ram, the leader of the Ad Dharm movement, saw Christianity as a sort of Dalit movement and as a means of Dalit identity formation. See Juergensmeyer (1982, 183-4).

(⁶) See Oommen (1985, 97-100) for the uprisings in the 1950s.

(⁷) See Bhassi (1986, 23-4, 41-5) for a typical example of such experiences.

(⁸) For a discussion of the issues of class and caste in Communist experience in south India, see Tharamangalam (1981, 495-6).

(⁹) See also Oommen (1984, 179).

(¹⁰) See Oommen (1985, 91) for details.

⁽¹¹⁾ Interviewee 1 and a group of members from the Thakazhy congregation. The author conducted a number of interviews as part of the wider study. In order to maintain their anonymity, the author refers to individual interviewees only with a number (Interviewee 1, Interviewee 2, and so on) throughout this chapter. All except one of the interviewees were affiliated with the former Anglican Church and the current-day Church of South India (CSI).

⁽¹²⁾ Interviewee 2.

⁽¹³⁾ See Bhassi (1984, 191, 208).

⁽¹⁴⁾ See Menon (1994) for the northern Kerala regions.

⁽¹⁵⁾ See Jeffery (1984, 1162) for a discussion of the transformation of the meaning of certain Malayalam words which were introduced by the Communist movement to some extent reflected 'the processes going on in the people's minds'.

⁽¹⁶⁾ See, for example, *Drum* (Magazine), No. 1, 1958, 1-4; *Drum* (Magazine), No. 2, 1959, 1-2; A Memorandum by Representatives of the SAM to Rt. Rev. M.M. John (Joseph, Mathai, and Isaac 1961, 5-11). Note: Throughout this chapter, the author has referenced various informal Malayalam-language 'publications' such as *Drum* and numerous 'handbills' that were distributed widely within the Pulaya community. These publications were often co-authored by groups of volunteers, with little consideration given to formal processes such as editing, author attribution, or circulation. *Drum*, for example, only ever produced two issues. However, in a largely oral cultural context, these publications proved both popular and influential, especially in regard to the topics discussed here.

⁽¹⁷⁾ See autobiographies of Communist leaders Bhassi (1986); George (1985); Nair (1984); Nair (1988).

⁽¹⁸⁾ It is quite likely that the practice of a weekly collection of a small portion of paddy from the labourers known as *Pidiyari*, which went towards party funds, may have come from Pulaya Christians who contributed Pidiyari to the church.

⁽¹⁹⁾ See Schoenfeld (1959, 239) for a description of local images of Communist leaders.

⁽²⁰⁾ Interviewee 3. For popular perception amongst villagers about E.M.S. Namboodiripad, see Nossiter (1982, 190f).

⁽²¹⁾ Interviewee 3.

⁽²²⁾ For brief discussions of the role of literacy in the success of Communist movement, see Kannan (1988, 128). Also see Jeffrey (1987, 468).

(²³) In 1931, enumerators followed rigid criteria to assess literacy, see Jeffrey (1987, 471).

(²⁴) Isaac et al., Letter to Bishop Corfield, 28 January 1944.

(²⁵) *Communist Party of India (Kerala State) Election Manifesto* (1957, 7) (in Malayalam).

(²⁶) *Communist Party of India (Kerala State) Election Manifesto* (1957, 5, 7, 12) (in Malayalam). Also see *Communist Party of India Kerala Committeede Thiranjeduppu Viknjapanam* (1957, 1–20).

(²⁷) *Communist Party of India (Kerala State) Election Manifesto* (1957) (in Malayalam). It is relevant to note here that the Kerala state meeting of the CPI in 1959 acknowledged that the CPI's pro-agricultural labourer and low-caste measures had given them a caste-bound image, that is, as a party which cared for the lower castes. See *Communist Party of India Fifth Kerala State Meeting* (1959, 35–6) (in Malayalam).

(²⁸) 'Communist Manthri Sabhayude Prakyapanam' (Handbill in Malayalam) (1957, 12–13).

(²⁹) See for details Nossiter (1982, 147).

(³⁰) For Syrian Christians' and church leaders' response to the 'liberation struggle', see Thomas (1974, 142–8).

(³¹) *Deepika* 10 June 1959.

(³²) *Deepika* 10 June 1959.

(³³) See Koshy (1968, 29) for Syrian Christian perceptions of Dalit Christians' political preferences.

(³⁴) 'Akhila Kerala Cheramar Hindu-Christian Sumgadana' (1959) (Handbill in Malayalam).

(³⁵) 'Akhila Kerala Cheramar Hindu-Christian Sumgadana' (1959).

(³⁶) Interviewee 4.

(³⁷) Whereas the Pulaya Hindu narratives associate Communism with liberation from traditional 'slavery'. See Den Uyl (1995, 122).

(³⁸) For studies on Syrian Christian caste practices, see Fuller (1976, 53–70); Forrester (1980, 97–114); Koilparampil (1982); Viswanathan (1993).

(³⁹) *Drum* (1959, 1f).

(⁴⁰) *Drum* (1958, 4).

(⁴¹) Joseph (1962).

(⁴²) Joseph (1962).

(⁴³) See *Drum* (1958) and *Drum* (1959).

(⁴⁴) Translation from Malayalam, 'C.S.I. Sabhayil Avasar Innum Adimakal', n.d. (Handbill in Malayalam).

(⁴⁵) Translation from Malayalam, see *Drum* (1959, 1).

(⁴⁶) Joseph and Mathai (1960, 3) (in Malayalam).

(⁴⁷) For details, see Joseph (1962).

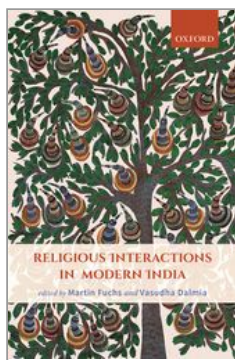
(⁴⁸) For details, see Koshy (1965).

(⁴⁹) Here I am using and responding to a recent comprehensive study on conversions in India in which Heredia states, conversion could become 'a passage to a new social identity that empowers and frees the group' (Heredia 2007, 133, 331f). Heredia observes that 'Identity and dignity are intimately connected. ... The affirmation or the negation of one carries over to the other' (Heredia 2007, 107).

(⁵⁰) See the conclusion of Juergensmeyer (1982, 269) and Bauman (2008).

(⁵¹) For 'conversion as multiple belongings in a diverse and complex pluralistic society', see Heredia (2007, 331f). A comprehensive evaluation only reveals multiple belongings that Christian conversion brings in and rendezvous with multilateral identities.

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Dhamma and the Common Good

Religion as Problem and Answer: Ambedkar's Critical Theory of Social Relationality¹

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Abstract and Keywords

The chapter discusses Bhimrao Ambedkar's approach to religion. Attacking the religious base of a society in which 'graded inequality' was engrained, his project was one of a new universalism of solidarity, grounded in his assumptions about human nature. The chapter explores the socio-analytical frame and the socio-philosophical principles through which Ambedkar approached human sociality, which led him to conclude that religion was a necessity for society, not least under conditions of modernity. True religion for Ambedkar was to promote a universalist idea(l) of humaneness and fellow feeling. For him it was the moral standard that is sacred and that replaces God— a post-religious religion. This found the most adequate expression in the teachings of the Buddha. Unable to convince wider society, Ambedkar pursued the project of conversion to Buddhism of Dalits only. Still, with his magnum opus, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Ambedkar attempted to lay the ground for a moral order that embraces all humans.

Keywords: Bhimrao Ambedkar, 'graded inequality', universalism of solidarity, human sociality, post-religious religion, Buddha, The Buddha and His Dhamma

Introduction: The Revival of Buddhism

Buddhism had been obliterated for centuries in most parts of India. Interest in Indian Buddhism, historically, theoretically, and practically, started resurging from the very last years of the eighteenth century onwards.² Involved, on the

one hand, were not only archaeologists and philologists studying the Pali and Sanskrit texts, most prominently Thomas Rhys Davids, but also R.G. Bhandarkar, Indian and non-Indian writers such as Edwin Arnold, Krishna Arjun Kerluskar (a teacher of B.R. Ambedkar who supported him during his early **(p.365)** career), Dharmanand Kosambi, or Bhadant Anand Kausalyayan, and Theosophists, particularly Colonel Olcott. Starting, on the other hand, were attempts at a revival of Buddhism in India. Widely known are the efforts of Anagarika Dharmapala, who as a layperson founded the Mahabodhi Society in Colombo in 1891, but shifted the head office to Calcutta and had as his main aim to regain Buddhist control of the Mahabodhi Temple in Bodhgaya, the place of the Buddha's enlightenment.

Parallel to that, 'the discovery of a new historical agent, Buddhism' (Rao 2009, 150), allowed Dalits to develop an alternative to caste Hinduism. Sections of Dalits turned to Buddhism and attempted to revive its emancipatory message. The movement started by Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar (1891–1956) was one of the latest and the most influential. Before that, but long neglected in scholarship, Pandit Iyothee Thass (or Thassar) (1845–1914) had initiated a movement of revival of Buddhism in Tamil Nadu, which combined anti-Brahminism with the propagation of Dravidianism. He started the Sakya Buddhist Society (later also called South Indian Buddhist Association) in 1898. In close contact with him stood Laskhmi Narasu (1861–1934), who developed his own strongly rationalist interpretation of Buddhism and remained a supporter of the South Indian Buddhist Society after Iyothee Thass's death. The South Indian Buddhist Association lost its impetus in the 1940s (Aloysius 1998, 182–4).³ Ambedkar, at the time when his interest in Buddhism deepened, engaged closely with Lakshmi Narasu's *Essence of Buddhism*, expressing high regard for both author and book. Ambedkar brought out a new edition of the book in 1948. In the 1950s, he also met with representatives of South Indian Buddhism and insofar was at least aware of Iyothee Thass's legacy (Aloysius 1998, 187f).⁴

(p.366) Ambedkar's revival of Buddhism happened at the time when colonial rule had just been replaced by postcolonial self-rule. It has to be seen as part of the struggle over the contours of independent India in the context of a globalizing and, potentially, universalizing world. Concepts like those of religious reform or even conversion cannot do full justice to the significance of this revival, and this for several reasons. For one, while Ambedkar reconnected to and revived an Indic tradition that had been forgotten, he did not reform a living tradition. The 'religion' Ambedkar converted to on 14 October 1956, together with a large number of followers, had first to be reintroduced by their own actions. It had to be excavated or retrieved from sources other than the traditions directly at hand. Second, while he had made some claims that those who became, or rather were made, Untouchables had originally been Buddhists, who had been persecuted for that very reason, it is thus not uncritical acclaim of one's own (immediate) past that led the movement. Third, this revival, like the

one undertaken by Iyothee Thass, represented at the same time a critical stance towards other traditions.⁵ The revival was a critique of tradition by way of (another) tradition. The target of course was Brahminical Hinduism. Fourth, for those who have been the carriers of this revival movement, Mahars and other Dalit groups, this revival meant an ambivalent relationship to their specific local traditions. The revival is an expression of a history of broken identity. For those who had no voice within the realm of Hinduism and within society at large, it meant regaining a voice that tapped other (non-Hindu) sources. But, above all, positively viewed, this revival, fifthly, also was a proposal for a change of the value base of society. In this sense, it represented a call from the side of those who stood at the bottom of society, whom others traditionally have not listened to, and did not even respect as full human beings. In particular, the progenitors of this movement were not readily accepted as authors of or even authorities on general ethical values. Addressed to everybody, it was a call to change one's attitude towards others. In this sense then, finally, this revival represented the idea of universal **(p.367)** morality or religion, and thus of an Indian religious tradition which was not confined just to India.

This chapter adds to the rapidly rising number of writings on Ambedkar, now increasingly also including scholars who are not of Dalit background. In 2001, I could still confirm Upendra Baxi's (1995)⁶ observation that Ambedkar did not get the due he deserved within the context of Indian political and social thought (and beyond that within global discourse; Fuchs 2001). For long, Ambedkar's message had been primarily carried by Dalits. Ambedkar had fought for Dalits and a change of conditions of their lives, he had fought for the improvement of the lot of others at the bottom of society, for equal rights for women,⁷ but he had also fought for an overhaul of Indian society and for the enforcement and implementation of universal values. Over and over again, Ambedkar had addressed a wider public besides Dalits, in India and beyond India. Being acknowledged today beyond this immediate constituency also implies that Ambedkar's thought is being contextualized and appropriated in new ways.⁸

The following is an attempt to further advance the understanding of Ambedkar's religious concerns. I will not deal with the details of Ambedkar's use of Buddhist sources or with the question whether his rendering of the Buddha's message complies in all respects with the dominant strands of Buddhist thought.⁹ Instead, I will concentrate on the principles that guided Ambedkar in his approach to the revival of Buddhism. I will focus on what one could call Ambedkar's theory of the social, which underlies his conceptualization of religion and of social and religious change. I consider his theory of the social the key to his vision. How Ambedkar conceived of society and social relations **(p.368)** frames his ideas of religion and possible futures. This sociological and socio-philosophical frame has still to get its full due in research on Ambedkar and in discussions about

religious change, in India and beyond.¹⁰ In this, I differ from approaches that focus on Ambedkar only as a political actor or as religious strategist.

The following reconstructs the main dimensions of Ambedkar's sociology in the first part and of his concept of religion in the second part. Ambedkar did not necessarily write in the form of academic treatises after he left university, even though there are sections with a strongly scholarly sociological (or economic, religious studies, or historical) rhetoric. There remain gaps and loose ends, if one looks at Ambedkar's thought from the perspective of a social theorist. But, obviously, Ambedkar's was not a theoretical agenda for its own sake.

Ambedkar's Sociology¹¹

The driving force throughout Ambedkar's lifetime was the struggle to secure a dignified life for everyone, or 'living worthily', as he called it, as an individual and as a group (Ambedkar 1989a, 66). His starting point and deep concern was the plight of Dalits, their inhuman living conditions and conditions of marginalization and oppression.¹² He did not see this as only a special problem of one group of people, or even as a condition whose resolution could be the Dalits' adaption to the ways of the higher castes (what was later labelled 'Sanskritization'). For him, Dalits had to be proactive, regarding their own situation and regarding society at large. At the same time, he **(p.369)** emphasized the necessity of a thorough change of the attitudes and practices of all other members of society. Conceptually too Ambedkar took a comprehensive view. He saw the problems that Dalits face within the wider context of the question of the constitution of society and against the backdrop of anthropological assumptions and universal conditions of human cooperation. In this regard, he undertook strong efforts to gain a deeper understanding of the mechanisms as well as the potentialities of social life and to identify the possibilities and requirements for social transformation and for a change of the mode in which people interact and relate to each other. At the same time, Ambedkar's sociological approach, like that of many other sociologists and social philosophers, including John Dewey, the academic teacher who had impressed Ambedkar the most, combines (as he himself acknowledges; Ambedkar 1987b, 5) the analytical with a normative perspective.¹³ Both theoretically and practically, with regard to those who sought emancipation as well as with regard to the relations within society at large, the question of religion as core social force provided the key for him.

Attitudes and Ideals: The Power of Social Imaginaries

While Ambedkar obviously took off from a moral stance concerning the situation of Dalits ('Untouchables'), he was not satisfied with just a moral response in the form of a simple appeal to humanist or religious values (religiously informed compassion, *agape*), nor was he satisfied with a moral appeal to non-Dalits (as proposed by Gandhi), and certainly not with promises of otherworldly relief (by way of belief in a transcendental power), nor with a formal maxim that everyone,

Dalits as well as non-Dalits, would be supposed to take **(p.370)** as their guideline in their daily actions. Nor did he think, not even later when he had been invested with a leading role in designing the Indian Constitution, that a legal response alone would be a sufficient safeguard. Ambedkar undertook to both understand the mechanisms which led to as well as helped reproduce the suppression of Dalits and the possibilities of an alternative. While he strongly believed that Dalits had to assert themselves and take the lead in the struggle for a change in society, he felt the necessity to base this on an understanding of how society operates and reproduces itself.

Taking a sociological perspective, the focus could have been either to look for structural mechanisms or to focus on the actions and the behaviour of the individual members of society. In a way Ambedkar did both, however he saw the key to the modes of behaviour, and through them to the social order, elsewhere, on a deeper level: decisive for him are the underlying values and norms that find articulation in the routinized attitudes and practices of social actors. Moreover, he developed a complex analytics concerning the interlinkage of ideational (cultural) and social dimensions. He had in view both explicit and implicit layers and mechanisms and proposed a very advanced concept of the social potency of ideas, anticipating later social thought.

For him, basic values and norms are largely religiously grounded. He saw caste and social inequality among Hindus as religiously consecrated (Ambedkar 1989a, 65), and having 'a divine basis' (Ambedkar 1989a, 69). Equally, he sought a religious base for a more egalitarian value system and the overthrowing of caste. He saw the cultural (and this, for him, was largely equivalent with religious) elites—the 'intellectual class'—develop and propagate the values and norms of a society, similar to what Max Weber called the 'Träger', 'carriers', of a religious or normative order (Ambedkar 1989a, 71; see Weber 1972/1978 [1920/1921]; 2004b, 111). It is here that a structural aspect comes in. Again comparable to Weber, for Ambedkar it was the interests of these elites that found reflection in the respective dominant values and norms.¹⁴ However, other than Weber, Ambedkar did not apply one common format to all religious elites, but left room for very different forms and degrees of impact of the interests of the religious elites on religious **(p.371)** ideas, especially distinguishing between Brahmins and *bhikkhus* (and the Buddhist *sangha*, the community of Buddhist monks and nuns).

On the level of everyday social action, Ambedkar focused on the attitudes of social actors towards each other and towards other sentient beings and towards things, inscribed into their dispositions (Ambedkar 1992, 218, 284f) and 'conduct' (Ambedkar 1989a, 59, 68, 78), giving expression to norms and values shared by wide sections of the population.¹⁵ People relate to values and norms directly, but more importantly the articulation of norms happens routinely, unreflectively.¹⁶ 'Caste is a notion, it is a state of mind' (Ambedkar 1989a, 68).

'All reform consists in a change in the notions, sentiment and mental attitudes of the people towards men and things' (Ambedkar 1989a, 59, cf. 57). Ambedkar deploys a range of terms: besides disposition, common conduct and mental attitude, 'habits' and 'outlook' (Ambedkar 1989a, 78), 'spirit' (anti-social, public), 'sense' (of charity), 'sympathy' to others, 'treatment' of others (Ambedkar 1989a, 56–58).¹⁷ He takes this pragmatist concept of routine action from John Dewey, but one can also see certain affinities with the fourth type in Max Weber's typology of social action, that of 'traditional' action, with the concept of habitualized collective mentalities of the Annales School (**p.372**) of historians, or with Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus as embodied dispositions. Ambedkar pays more attention to the aspect of the habitual than Weber does and does not share Weber's slightly negative associations regarding the role of habits and customs as a general position. Like Bourdieu (for example, 1977), Ambedkar grappled with the connections between the dispositions of social actors and the reproduction of the social structure.¹⁸

On the conceptual level again, Ambedkar undertakes two interesting steps. He identifies ideals, especially religious ones, as a 'social force', but a force of a particular kind. On this background he establishes the role of imaginary models of society and sociality that frame the thinking and the thinkable in a particular societal context.

Besides, Religion is a social force. As I have pointed out Religion stands for a scheme of divine governance. The scheme becomes an ideal for society to follow. The ideal may be non-existent in the sense that it is something which is constructed. But although non-existent, it is real. For an ideal it has full operative force which is inherent in every ideal.¹⁹ Those who deny the importance of religion not only forget this, they also fail to realize how great is the potency and sanction that lies behind a religious ideal as [compared; correction mine] with that of a purely secular ideal. This is probably due to the lag which one sees between the real and the ideal which is always present whether the ideal is religious or secular. But the relative potency of the two ideals is to be measured by another test—namely their power to override the practical instincts of man. ... The practical instincts of man do yield to the prescriptions of a religious ideal however much the two are opposed to each other. ... This means that a religious ideal has a hold on mankind, irrespective of an earthly gain.²⁰ ... A religious ideal never fails to work (**p.373**) so long as there is faith in that ideal. To ignore religion is to ignore a live wire. (Ambedkar 1987b, 23f)

In a very sociological way, Ambedkar regarded ideals and religions as forces that impact on social action. At the same time, Ambedkar also propounded the concept of 'ideal society'. While there are instances in which this notion just means a society that he considers perfect (Ambedkar 1989a, 64), he elsewhere

takes the ideal as part of reality and contrasts two conflicting concepts of 'ideal society', the one based on 'the rule of graded inequality' and expressed in the idea of *chaturvarna* (the hierarchical system of four varnas or classes of people in Hindu society that excludes the 'Untouchables' as the fifth class; Ambedkar 1992, 87–9; 301–3), the other 'based on righteousness' and expressed in the sangha 'model of society' (Ambedkar 1992, 434; 302–6).²¹ In both cases, social life is seen as being guided by a foundational or framing image of society: 'An ideal must be practical and must be shown to be practicable. ... It is necessary to have a *picture of a society* working on the basis of the ideal ...' (Ambedkar 1992, 434; emphasis mine). Ideal thus stands here for an underlying set of ideas or images. Ambedkar anticipates aspects of the concept of social imaginaries, or social imaginary significations, as later spelled out, in slightly different ways, by Cornelius Castoriadis (1987; 1997) and after him Charles Taylor (2002).²²

(p.374) This twofold concept of the social force of ideational structures gets tragically confirmed by the attitudes of those who are at the receiving end of the social order. Ambedkar saw the hierarchizing attitude so thoroughly implanted in the modes of disposition and social interaction that forms of this attitude could also be discovered among those who themselves are its victims, including Untouchables themselves. As Ambedkar strongly deplores, Untouchables 'are infested with the caste system in which they believe as much as does the caste Hindu. This caste system among the Untouchables has given rise to mutual rivalry and jealousy ...' (Ambedkar 1989f, 266; cf. 1989d, 18–21; cf. Herrenschmidt 2004, 45).

Social values, norms, ideals, or models have both explicit and implicit dimensions. While to function it seems important that they work without being reflected, their installation is seen as a deliberate act. And deliberate policies also contribute to their perpetuation (aside and beyond implicit reproduction). With respect to India, Brahmins obviously have been, over long periods of history, the carriers of the first model of an ideal society (Ambedkar 1989a, 71), whereas the bhikkhus stand for the alternative one (Ambedkar 2003a, 106).²³ The Brahminical ideas of hierarchy were imparted to society, and were legitimated by, the *shastras*, before all else the Manusmriti: the hereditary system of gradation, separation, prescription, privileges, exclusion, **(p.375)** and debasement (Ambedkar 1989a, 68 et passim; Ambedkar 1987b 36f, 45, 48, 65; Ambedkar 1992, 87–9; 301–3). The public burning of this text in Mahad (Maharashtra) by Ambedkar and his followers in 1927 was a symbolic expression of the attack on the value basis of Hindu society. These ideas Ambedkar saw reflected in many other core Hindu texts, including the Bhagavad Gita (Ambedkar 1987b, 80f). The core of the Buddhist alternative Ambedkar found in canonical as well as non-canonical Buddhist literature belonging to the Theravada, Sarvastivada, as well as Mahayana schools of Buddhism, requiring a new reading (Sangharakshita 1986, 147).²⁴ Ambedkar, however, was of two

minds regarding the question whether the sangha could today still be trusted as intellectual guides and as servants of the 'common man' (see later).

The concept of intellectual or religious elites finally introduces the question of the general concept of power. Ambedkar here makes an interesting theoretical move and suggests that religion be included in a theory of power: 'Religion, social status and property are all sources of power and authority' (Ambedkar 1989a, 45). What changes over time is which source of power is predominant. It seems that Ambedkar here takes the political (political power) as a cover term, whereas he elsewhere takes political power as a category of its own. However, there also shows another ambivalence regarding the relation between religion and power. On the one hand, a source of power, which manifests itself for example in the form of control of priests or other religious figures/specialists 'over the common man', at other instances it is religion itself that wields power, in the sense of force as discussed above: 'the power of religion over men', 'the dominion which religion exercises over the minds of men' (Ambedkar 1989a, 44f). One might use this differentiation to distinguish between two positions of Ambedkar. While he targets religion as a source of **(p.376)** power over men, besides other such sources, he principally accepts that humans are oriented by religion (which works itself into their attitudes): it is the choice of religion that makes the difference. Ambedkar aims for reformation or revolution of religion, but not for rescindment of religion (or secularization in the sense of its privatization). It is in this sense that one has to see his statement that 'political revolutions have always been preceded by social and religious revolutions' (Ambedkar 1989a, 43).

Still, the way the different forms or dimensions of power interact or permeate each other is left open. Not only would this require an elaborate as well contextually specified theory of the intersection of 'traditional' and colonial political, economic, religious, and possibly other institutions of power, something still under debate today. In addition, we would need conceptual clarification regarding the connection between the institutional axes of power and their mental, attitudinal, or dispositional dimensions. What Ambedkar is headed for is something that has concerned many social theorists. He wanted to grasp the combination of the prevalence of an attitude, its connection with a world view or social imaginary, and the social power structure connected with this or lying behind this. One can see here parallels to the theoretical reflections of Antonio Gramsci (1998), who incidentally was born in the same year as Ambedkar and whose main aim was to understand cultural hegemony, or the 'manufacture of consent', that is, the way the views, values, and norms of the dominant classes or groups, their definition of social reality, apparently became the 'common sense' values of all members of society. Gramsci also thought about ways of establishing counter-hegemony. Still, the problem remains: enforcement and enshrinement of values point into somewhat different directions. Experiencing values as imposed creates an immediate legitimacy crisis and directly triggers

the search for alternatives and opposition or resistance; sharing values attitudinally lets them appear as one's own and makes it less likely and less easy to question them. Both perceptions (enforcement and enshrinement) show up in Ambedkar's thinking.²⁵

(p.377) Effects and Consequences of Social Attitudes

Dispositional traits and power dynamics rather than simple structural features, seem for Ambedkar to be the prime mechanisms that reproduce the order of graded inequality and discrimination. Regarding the effects and consequences of this order and its underlying values, Ambedkar again focused both on the individual and on the social structure.

Regarding the effects on individuals, Ambedkar was most concerned by the denial of dignity to those who have been termed 'Untouchables' and the contempt shown to them, the 'deliberate debasement of human personality' (Ambedkar 1987b, 36). The hierarchical organization 'produces an ascending scale of hatred and descending scale of contempt' (Ambedkar 1987b, 48; similar Ambedkar 1992, 91), a system that is 'vicious', 'pernicious', 'degrading', that 'deadens, paralyses and cripples the people' (Ambedkar 1989a, 47, 61, 63). Touching on issues of humiliation and pollution, he decries that Dalits are forced to do 'degraded' work, 'provok(ing) one to aversion' (Ambedkar 1989a, 48; cf. Dewey 2002a [1916], 370).²⁶ He condemns the lack of safeguards against the 'misdeeds' from those above (Ambedkar 1989a, 62) as well as the lack of freedom to choose one's occupation. A major consequence of this, which he again and again deplores, is the exclusion of people of lower-caste backgrounds from access to education and respected occupations, from intellectual culture and life-chances, the lack of concern 'to develop the capacity of an individual' and appreciate a person's 'merits' 'apart from his caste'; 'individual preference has no place' in the caste system (Ambedkar 1989a, 47f, 57).

The lack of esteem for individuals' actual abilities also meant, and here he turns to the structural consequences, that these individuals could not contribute to the flourishing of society. Society, by controlling and limiting large sections of the people, harms itself and makes itself inefficient. In strong words, Ambedkar attacks the dearth of 'social efficiency' of Hindu society, which harms and weakens Indian society (Ambedkar 1989a, 38, 47f; Ambedkar 1987b, 67f).²⁷ The **(p.378)** segregation between castes means that 'Hindus cannot be said to form a society or a nation' (Ambedkar 1989a, 50; also 66, 79). He compared the fragmentation of Hindus with the comparatively stronger cohesion among Sikhs or Muslims in India (Ambedkar 1989a, 55). Hindus lack a 'consciousness of kind' (Ambedkar 1989a, 50), using a term coined by Franklin H. Giddings, the first sociologist and one of Ambedkar's teachers at Columbia.²⁸ To constitute a society means to possess 'things in common' (Ambedkar 1989a, 51). '(A)s a

system of social organization, Chaturvarnya is impracticable, harmful and ... a miserable failure' (Ambedkar 1989a, 59).

Structurally speaking, it is the division and gradation of society which is the main effect of the attitude of deprecation that Ambedkar points out. For him, what set Hindu India apart from other class societies is the fact that people are being assigned to separate social categories that are ordered hierarchically, and that everyone's place is assigned in advance and permanently: a 'division of labourers' and not just a division of labour (Ambedkar 1989a, 47; Ambedkar 1987b, 67²⁹). The analytical term that Ambedkar later coined for this type of hierarchical order and that one can then find across his writings, but that was already entailed in *Annihilation of Caste*, is that of 'graded **(p.379)** inequality' (Ambedkar 1992, 87–91, 301; cf. Ambedkar 1989a 47; cf. Herrenschmidt 2004, 42–7).³⁰

Dispositionally, this peaks in an attitude of 'indifferentism' that both lies at the origin as it is the consequence of the social division: the absence of 'fellow-feeling' and the lack of a social or 'public' spirit and of concern for those not belonging to one's immediate group (Ambedkar 1989a, 55–7). What for Ambedkar predominates in the society he observes is the focus by each group on the 'interests of its own', to be protected against the interests of other groups. Social diagnosis and normative critique coalesce in the designation 'anti-social spirit' (Ambedkar 1989a, 51f; Ambedkar 1992, 324).³¹

Theory of Social Suffering

At the centre of Ambedkar's concerns are the discriminating attitudes of people and the contemptuous treatment of their respective others. What he foremost castigated is the lack of 'solidarity', 'charity' and 'sympathy to the deserving' (Ambedkar 1989a, 52, 56; Ambedkar 1987b, 65). This became his central concern in *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, his last work.³² In the context of his exposition of Buddhism as an alternative social model, he expanded on the feelings of solidarity, with the terms compassion, *karuna* and *maitri*, now becoming central. Inversely he now subsumed the experiences of debasement and exclusion under the broader notion of 'suffering'. Ambedkar developed this into a general thesis about social suffering and the conditions of suffering.³³ He was not convinced by the view that takes suffering as simply a general feature of the human condition. He strictly objected to the conventional Buddhist narrative that the Buddha took *parivrajā*, left home, because he saw a dead, **(p.380)** a sick, and an old person (Ambedkar 1992, 'Introduction'). Instead, Ambedkar saw suffering and unhappiness, 'sorrow-misery', or *dukkha* in Buddhist (Pali) terms,³⁴ as core feature of humans' social condition. The most prominent of the features or backgrounds of suffering for him were 'inhumanity' and 'injustice' (Ambedkar 1992, 126, 129, 254, 325). It was religion, and especially *dhamma*, the moral and philosophical teaching of the Buddha, that for him had to provide the forum to address these conditions. The recognition of suffering

actually forms for him the basis of religion proper, that is, dhamma: '[H]ow to remove this suffering from the world is the only purpose of Dhamma. ... A religion which fails to recognise this is no religion at all' (Ambedkar 1992, 121).

While taking up the Buddha's central intuition, Ambedkar again pushed 'religion' towards the social domain. Pursuing the Buddhist frame, he focused on the search for the causes of suffering and on the search for ways to remove suffering. In this, he conceived of Buddhist thought as a kind of a socio-analytical mode. The main causes of human suffering, as he saw them pronounced by the Buddha himself, were poverty and exploitation (Ambedkar 1992, 10, 91, 121, 129, 368, 510–12, 587). Behind these was the craving for worldly objects, for gain and possession (Ambedkar 1992, 238f, cf. 357, 588f). Ambedkar went even further and attributed the language of class struggle to the Buddha. Accordingly, it was the conflict between classes, based on private ownership of property, which was at 'the root of all sorrow and suffering in the world' (Ambedkar 1992, 57f, cf. 239, 325; 1987a, 444).³⁵ Rather than Marx, it was the Buddha who for him stood for the most comprehensive attempt to understand the (social) causes of suffering and to remove suffering and to 'make mankind happy' (Ambedkar 1992, 75), and Buddhism was the first religion to do so.³⁶ **(p.381)** 'Never [before] in the history of the world has any founder of religion taught that the recognition of human suffering was the real basis of religion' (Ambedkar 1992, 131).

Suffering in the eyes of the Buddha, as Ambedkar understood him, was man-made. He objected to the fatalistic Brahminical concept of *karma*, according to which someone's life, and this includes suffering, was predetermined by one's deeds in a past life (Ambedkar 1992, 91, 103).³⁷ The way to overcome suffering was to get rid of 'wrong' dispositions and acquire 'the disposition to do good': '[T]raining of the mind ... is the same as the training of a man's disposition' (Ambedkar 1992, 127, 283–5): '*A good disposition is the only permanent foundation of and guarantee of permanent goodness*. That is why the Buddha gave the first place to the training of the mind which is the same as the training of a man's dispositions' (Ambedkar 1992, 285; emphasis Ambedkar's). This was required not individually, but on a society-wide scale.³⁸ The aim was to get people to voluntarily work for social change, not achieve change by use of force (Ambedkar 1987a, 461).

Emergent Possibilities

But what are the chances and possibilities of social transformation, of changing unjust conditions and inhuman behaviour and treatment of others in the face of the fact that behavioural attitudes, social value orders, and power structures are so deeply ingrained? Here again we **(p.382)** have to distinguish between Ambedkar's principled perspective and the hard realism of his social analysis.

His political realism, underpinned by social analysis, led Ambedkar to pinpoint the factors that rendered rebellion impossible. Why, Ambedkar asks, ‘have there not been social revolutions in India’ (Ambedkar 1989a, 63; Ambedkar 1987b, 70)? His answer is complex. On the one hand, as mentioned, he saw the victims of hierarchization drawn into participating in the very value system and normative mechanisms that degrades them. The gradation of castes makes it impossible to put up ‘a common front’ (Ambedkar 1989a, 72). On the other hand, Ambedkar identifies two (political and economic) mechanisms to keep people down. First, a systematically enforced dearth of resources on the side of the lower castes and classes, especially of means of defence (weapons) and of access to education, having been systematically prohibited from acquiring knowledge (Ambedkar 1989a, 62f; Ambedkar 1987b, 70). Second, the enforcement of the Brahminical social order and values by law, that is, a penal system that included ‘penalty of death’ (Ambedkar 1989a, 60f).³⁹ Ambedkar regards all of this as a watertight system of nearly absolute control, which left no escape routes for the lower sections: ‘... [T]he lower classes of Hindus have been completely disabled for direct action’ (Ambedkar 1989a, 63).

Against the backdrop of this disillusioning view, Ambedkar addresses the question of change on a basal level, and this already in the same writings of his middle period. Taking off from there, *The Buddha and His Dhamma* represents an appeal to everyone to accept the necessity *and* sacredness of sociality. Ambedkar again starts from basic observations about human life and social practice: on the one hand, a thesis on how routinized behaviour and deeply engrained dispositions can be intermitted and altered, on the other hand, the contention of (potential) hermeneutic excess. Together these constitute a two-tier argument that allows Ambedkar to consolidate the fundamental claim of change as the constant of social life (underwriting his hopes). Again, we encounter here a socio-philosophical and even transcendentalist grounding, pointing to the ideas of John Dewey.

(p.383) Ambedkar, who, as we could see, is not taken in by a belief in structural determination avoids the trap of opposing the reproduction of social relationships and social change. Structural properties—positionalities as well as belief structures—feed into social action while they have to be instantiated through actions. Change, which has to come from human action, for Ambedkar then requires the insight on the side of social actors to be able to do otherwise. Taking his clues from John Dewey, Ambedkar proposes a view of social action that integrates the potentiality for reflection and critique with a notion of routine. Similar to Dewey, Ambedkar depicts the routine ways of human life as ‘habitual and unreflective’ (Ambedkar 1989a, 73, 75).⁴⁰ It is only when routine ways are interrupted or obstructed, and this is historically contingent, that one is made to pause and consider possibilities. Only a situation, ‘which presents a dilemma—a crisis’, can trigger processes of reflection ‘in the sense of active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge

in the light of the grounds that support it and further conclusions to which it tends' (Ambedkar 1989a, 73, quoting Dewey 1991 [1910], 6, 11). What distinguishes Ambedkar from Dewey is that he is generally less optimistic than his teacher. Ambedkar regards at least the overall reconsideration of beliefs and knowledges as something 'quite rare' (Ambedkar 1989a, 73). The difficulty with this theoretical model, which is of central theoretical relevance and stands at the core of Deweyan sociological pragmatism,⁴¹ is that the awareness of a dilemma or crisis is not necessarily shared by all members of a society; it is especially not the same for those who profit from the order of things and those who suffer from it. Ambedkar has to contend with the reality of the better off not necessarily seeing their way of life as being in crisis. The only hope for change at this front is a possible insight on their side into the lack of efficiency of society as a whole if no change is effected.

This theorem, which allows for the combining of the recursiveness of social life with social change and thus also makes allowance for what today is addressed as the contingency of social practice, shows Ambedkar ahead of the mainstream of social thought of his days. Ambedkar is a theorist who believes in the basic dynamism of social **(p.384)** life. In a second take on this, taking a longer-term historical perspective, he defends a position that claims constant change as basic feature of all societies. Opposing the idea of things *sanatan*, eternal, as propounded by Gandhi and other speakers of contemporary Hinduism who wanted to secure the eternal truths of their religion and thus protect the ancient, inegalitarian ways of social coexistence,⁴² Ambedkar insists 'that there is nothing fixed, nothing eternal ...; that everything is changing, that change is the law of life for individuals as well as for society' (Ambedkar 1989a, 79). For Ambedkar, this is not just a factual, but also a normative statement: not only is everything changing, things, and especially values, also have to constantly change (cf. Ambedkar 1989a, 92). He therefore adds importantly: 'In a changing society, there must be a constant revolution of old values ...' (Ambedkar 1989a, 79). Turning this into an instruction for action, quoting John Dewey, Ambedkar therefore asks to conserve and transmit only such achievements 'as make for a better future society' and to not expect the past to supply one's ideals. Instead, he calls for discarding the practices and traditions that are redundant, 'dead wood from the past', or even are 'positively perverse' (Dewey 2002a [1916], 24; quoted in Ambedkar 1989a, 79; cf. Ambedkar 2003a, 98; Dewey 2002b, 243f). The idea of constant change gets an even stronger underpinning later in *The Buddha and His Dhamma*. Taking the Buddhist conception of *sunyata*, Ambedkar develops a particular theory of emergentism, of the emergent properties, and thus the inherent changeability of (individual and social) life. This will be discussed later.

The Inherent Potentiality of Humankind

Ambedkar's thought shows a deep tension between political pessimism and ontological hope. Ambedkar was pessimistic that the ways Dalits were treated would be changed quickly (to destroy caste is a 'herculean' task, a 'task ... well-nigh impossible'; Ambedkar 1989a, 69). At the same time, social change, even fundamental change, would seem imminent. Below his pessimism, Ambedkar remained a **(p.385)** theoretical optimist: Even the worst digression from what one would consider the model of a good society points back to the ineradicable conditionalities of social life. For him, the overall direction in which social change has to go seems clear, written into the very idea of humanity he upholds. His is not belief in a teleological model of progress. References to possibilities of modern institutions, like the social opportunities offered by industrialization, the political opportunities offered by parliamentary democracy, and the rule of law or the critical role of the state, are empirical and pragmatic.⁴³ He builds on anthropological assumptions about possibilities inherent in humans in principle, which provide the direction in which society has to advance. Ambedkar assumes a certain human potentiality (for sociality!) that in principle always exists, only blocked by circumstances, especially social forces of power and dispositions at certain instances, and otherwise to be fostered or nurtured. We find an appeal to human commonalities throughout his major writings, commonalities which themselves assume a basic universal humaneness and sociability. These are not anthropological constants, but are aspects ingrained in humans qua humans as ontological potentials and as the most adequate (most natural) expressions of humanness. He is, in particular, interested in the potentiality for sociality.⁴⁴

One comes across concepts of solidarity, fellow feeling, compassion, maitri, and karuna, besides others. These terms point back to the European humanist and utilitarianist traditions (and find resonance **(p.386)** also in Dewey⁴⁵) as they do to Buddhist traditions (and tangentially to other religious traditions), which voiced these concepts much earlier. At the same time, Ambedkar stands at the threshold to contemporary discussions on justice and social recognition.

One can distinguish four levels in Ambedkar's argument, switching back and forth between them. The first concerns primordialist commonalities and bonds between people on the level of society or nation. On the other hand, he, secondly, argues with the help of what one could call moral universals, such as fellow-feeling, compassion, maitri, whose application cannot be restricted to a confined entity of people. Based on these, he appeals to, thirdly, basic social values or normative principles that give articulation to, as they develop, the moral universals. This concerns especially the values and norms of equality, liberty, fraternity, and justice. Finally, closing the circle, he addresses the social mechanisms needed to achieve these values and implement a morally ordered society, mechanisms that respect the dignity and freedom of the individual and

allow for an open, but concerted sociality. These he finds in communication and democratic practices (democracy understood in a broad sense).

To look at these levels of argument a little more closely:

1. Belonging, social bonding on the level of society or a nation (restricted universality): ‘association’, ‘consciousness of kind’, and other commonalities. Ambedkar refers, on the one hand, to a basic urge to be included as equal member with all others with whom one shares a social world, on the other hand to the contemporary political task of building a ‘strong’ nation among other nations (Ambedkar 1989a and other works).
2. The assumption of human universals: the sentiment of ‘fellow feeling’ or ‘fraternity’ as both ‘natural’ and necessary (Ambedkar 1987b, 44, 64). Based on this, Ambedkar postulates ‘the necessity for man to love man’ (Ambedkar 1992, 323).
3. Basic moral values and ethical directive principles that inform people how they *should* treat each other. These values and directives Ambedkar explicates using two different registers. On the one hand, the affective philanthropic language of ‘fellow feeling’, **(p.387)** ‘sympathy’, ‘compassion’, and ‘charity’, among other terms, ultimately being subsumed under the concepts of ‘karuna’ and ‘maitri’ (loving kindness to all human or all living or all sentient beings) (Ambedkar 1992, 128, 296–300, et passim).⁴⁶ ‘Righteous conduct’ based on such attitudes would make this world a ‘kingdom of righteousness’ (Ambedkar 1992, 282f). The other register refers to the core principles and values of equality, liberty, fraternity or solidarity, and justice.

It is not always easy to decide how Ambedkar employs and organizes or classifies these principles. Especially his conceptualization of ‘fraternity’ fluctuates. Following John Stuart Mill and pointing back to the Scottish Enlightenment, he characterizes fraternity as a ‘natural’ and ‘necessary’ ‘sentiment’, ‘which leads an individual to identify himself with the goods of others’, and equates it with a core term of this tradition, that of ‘fellow feeling’ (Ambedkar 1987b, 44).⁴⁷ On the other hand, he takes fraternity, together with liberty and equality, as a societal doctrine, principle, and value (Ambedkar 1989a, 77f). Finally, he considers fraternity, like liberty, ‘derivative’ of ‘equality *and* respect’, thus introducing another and essentially relational conceptualization at the level of basic principles (Ambedkar 1987b, 66; emphasis mine).

Elsewhere, liberty, equality, and fraternity together constitute what he calls the principle of justice (Ambedkar 1987b, 25), which acts as the norm or criterion ‘for judging right and wrong’ in modern society (Ambedkar 1987b, 22; modern here including all post-antique societies and religions). While constantly appealing to these principles, Ambedkar never undertook an attempt of systematic conceptualization of their

interrelationships. Valerian Rodrigues has also criticized Ambedkar's lack of critical engagement with these principles (1994, 143).

4. Social mechanisms to realize the core values or principles: mechanisms that respect the dignity and freedom of the individual and allow for an open but concerted sociality.

(p.388) Even if equality (be it alone or be it together with respect) constitutes the basic principle,⁴⁸ it is fraternity that marks the final goal. At the same time, fraternity also represents the mechanism (if not the premise) to reach the goal, and in this sense then the term is equated with what Ambedkar calls, following Dewey, 'social endosmosis' (Ambedkar 1989a, 57):⁴⁹ At the centre of a functioning society has to be free, equitable, open, and, in this sense, fluid communication, with mobility (of individuals), various points of contact, full of channels to communicate change, and with interests consciously shared across different modes of association.⁵⁰ Fraternity, instantiated through communication, becomes 'only another name for democracy': 'Democracy is not merely a form of Government. It is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience.'⁵¹ It is essentially an attitude of respect and reverence towards fellowmen' (Ambedkar 1989a 57). Ambedkar could thus equate democracy and fraternity (Ambedkar 1989a, 57). Elsewhere, he takes democracy as shorthand for liberty, equality, and fraternity (Ambedkar 1989a, 77).

Concerning democracy, understood in this broad sense, Ambedkar then goes into two directions. As a politician and legal scholar, who has to negotiate the terms of India's new Constitution, he has to face the limitations and restrictions of a democratic regime (to be). In that context, one has to see his deliberations on leadership. To facilitate the democratic development, Ambedkar in 1936 still saw the need of intellectual leadership, the need for 'guidance' of the 'masses' by the 'intellectual classes'; he deplored that the Hindu leaders, and here he included the Mahatma, had not intellectually 'regenerated' themselves **(p.389)** (Ambedkar 1989a, 94-6). As a social philosopher, twenty years later, he thought of other safeguards which allow for the development of fraternity (that is, democracy in the broad sense): a moral order based on mutual respect and love. His appeal, religiously undergirded, is now to the responsibility of each member of society: '... [According to the Buddha] the moral order rests on man and on nobody else' (Ambedkar 1992, 243). It is in this sense, as a sociological and at the same time moral concept of social action, which allows for good and bad forms, that Ambedkar reads the concept of *kamma* (*karma*) as 'man's action' and *vipaka* as its effect (Ambedkar 1992, 243). Society 'may choose' if it wants a bad or a good moral order (Ambedkar 1992, 317).⁵² But a morally good society 'cannot do without Dhamma' (Ambedkar 1992, 316).⁵³

Ambedkar thus combines a plea for social cohesion with a plea for respect for every human and for mutual concern. Equality appears as the primary and basic criterion. At the same time, one can see fraternity as the main goal. In a way, what Ambedkar tries to express in so many ways is that all these qualities or principles are mutually dependent, presupposing and reinforcing each other, but require an open, democratic society. For Ambedkar, the dimensions of the right, or just, and the good, more clearly differentiated in more recent debates (Joas 2000, especially ch. 10), appear as congruent; for him there is no tension between the two in an ideal society: the core of what is good is what is just. The ‘moral good’ is ‘justice to the individual’ (Ambedkar 1987b, 22). And what is ‘good for the individual’ also promotes the ‘social good’ (Ambedkar 1992, 123). Equally, he goes along with J.S. Mill in stating that utility and justice do not exclude each other (Ambedkar 1987b, 66).

(p.390) The Necessity of Religion

The Search for True Religion

Ambedkar never thought of leaving religion behind or that he could pursue the principles of liberty, equality, and solidarity (fraternity) without a religious-moral grounding. In his famous and engaged plea in 1936 for the annihilation of caste and his critique of the religious basis of the caste order—a year after he had publicly declared that he would ‘not die a Hindu’⁵⁴—he affirmed the ‘necessity for a religion’ and approvingly quoted Edmund Burke: ‘True religion is the foundation of society, the basis on which all true Civil Government rests, and both their sanction’ (Ambedkar 1989a, 76).⁵⁵ Societal change requires a new source, and it was clear for Ambedkar that this has to be a religious one. While in his view, religious ideals in general have a hold on mankind that secular ideas never have (Ambedkar 1987b, 23; see above), it is here that a new notion creeps in, that of ‘true’ religion. We will shortly see the significance of this. The religion to provide the new value base was not yet decided upon at this stage. For Ambedkar himself, the decision pro Buddhism seems to have crystallized by the late 1940s.⁵⁶

(p.391) As much as he attacked Hinduism, especially what he saw as its ‘Brahminical’ version, he showed some consideration for the Upanishads (Ambedkar 1989a, 78)⁵⁷ and for certain representatives of *bhakti*, especially Ramanujan and Kabir (Ambedkar 1989a, 74).⁵⁸ But in the end, he saw these forms of Hinduism either as toothless or confined by what he saw as Hinduism’s core, the ideal of inequality and ‘non-recognition’ (*sic*, see later) and even, regarding the Untouchables, the propagation of ‘a deliberate debasement of human personality’, enshrined in the Manusmriti (Ambedkar 1987b, 36).⁵⁹ The Manusmriti ‘must be regarded as the Bible of the Hindus ... containing the philosophy of Hinduism’ (Ambedkar 1987b, 8). Ambedkar saw the ideas of inequality worked into all other Hindu texts of significance. Regarding the Bhagavad Gita, he referred to those sections in particular that propagated

chaturvarna and the **(p.392)** predetermination of each one's occupation (Ambedkar 1987b, 80f; 1987c; 2003a, 100f).

The Idea and Meaning of Religion: The Discovery of Dhamma

Religion for Ambedkar is not a given thing. Nor does he consider the term an unproblematic generic concept. On the one hand, he joins discussions led within religious studies as to the problématiques of a general concept of religion (Ambedkar 1987b; Ambedkar 1992, 315f). On the other hand, and more importantly, he deems it necessary to distinguish between categories of religion, true and untrue religions, ethical, partly ethical, and non-ethical religions, or religions that put ethics at their centre and those that do not. What concerns him is the moral dimension of religions. It is not religion as such that is moral in his eyes, but only such religion that is true to what should be the centre of religion: true to universal 'spiritual' (Ambedkar 1989a) or 'moral' (Ambedkar 1992) principles. He made at least three attempts to distinguish between 'true' and untrue religion(s): (i) In 1936, in *Annihilation of Caste*, he makes a distinction between 'religions of rule' and 'religions of principle'; (ii) In 'The Philosophy of Hinduism', an undated manuscript (perhaps written around the same time when he wrote *Annihilation of Caste*),⁶⁰ he distinguishes between religions centred on society and religions centred on the individual; and (iii) In 1957, in *The Buddha and His Dhamma* (on which he worked until his death) he distinguishes between religions that take morality as their essence and those religions that treat morality as only an attachment to their metaphysical system. To look at all three more closely:

1. In his 1936 text, *Annihilation of Caste*, Ambedkar distinguished in a sociological manner and in a dichotomous and somewhat **(p.393)** abstract way between two forms of religion, 'Religion of Rules' and 'Religion of Principles' (Ambedkar 1989a, 76). The first, in his case mainly represented by Brahminical Hinduism with its main textual basis in the Vedas and the shastras, he dismisses and wants to see 'annulled' (Ambedkar 1989a, 76). Only religions of principle represent true religion, religion 'in the sense of spiritual principles, truly universal, applicable to all races, to all countries, to all times' (Ambedkar 1989a, 75). Ambedkar provides both theoretical or rational, ethical or moral arguments for the opposition between rules and principles. Conceptually, he makes a distinction between two attitudes to human action: on the one hand, 'habitual ways of doing things', on the other hand, 'methods of judging things', the ability 'to consider the bearings of [an agent's] desires and purposes' and thus to be able to act consciously and responsibly (Ambedkar 1989a, 75; quoting Dewey and Tufts 1978 [1908], 301).⁶¹ But he adds two further specifications. Regarding the first or rule-governed mode of religious action, it is not just the routine aspect per se that he targets, but particularly those kinds of habitual action which are done 'according to prescription', resembling 'recipes', and then become

habitualized (Ambedkar 1989a, 75).⁶² What he sees lacking in this case is the cognizant assessment on the part of social actors regarding the foundations of their convictions and practices. Regarding the second or principle-governed mode of religious action, he goes to the extreme to even allow for the possibility that a principle might turn out to be 'wrong' so that one might end up doing something incorrect: Dewey's experimental ways. It is the mode of being in the world and relating to the world that is of primary relevance: 'Doing what is said to be good by virtue of a rule and doing good in the light of a principle are two different things. The principle may be wrong but the act is conscious and responsible. The rule may be right but the act is mechanical' (Ambedkar 1989a, 75). Good religion, then, has to be a religion of responsibility:

(p.394) A religious act may not be a correct act but must at least be a responsible act. To permit of this responsibility, religion must mainly be a matter of principles only. It cannot be a matter of rules. The moment it degenerates into rules it ceases to be Religion, as it kills responsibility which is the essence of a truly religious act. (Ambedkar 1989a, 75)

The rationalist argument is thus equated with an ethics of responsibility. Religion of rules in its extreme form means law, 'ordinances', the imposition of a code, as well as the enforcement of 'commands and prohibitions' which stretch to all aspects of life, from sacrifice to the political; this is what (*sanatan*) *dharma* stands for in his view. The 'worst evil' in this is not just 'anxious and servile conformity' as such, but that the laws are considered to be 'perpetual', 'eternal', final, and fixed (Ambedkar 1989a, 75f). At the other end, there are principles that he, as such, also seems to consider perpetual, but which, as principles, do not prescribe a specific course of action, but guide one's thinking and thus one's actions (Ambedkar 1989a, 75). One might consider principles as circumscribing what would be legitimate possibilities of action. The examples Ambedkar mentions in this context are the principles of justice and 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity' (Ambedkar 1989a, 75, 78). He proposes 'a new doctrinal basis' to religion in consonance with these principles (Ambedkar 1989a, 77), even though doctrine might not be quite the right term here. The contrast between rule and principle can be seen as a conception that accompanies Ambedkar's thinking; it reappears in *The Buddha and His Dhamma* (Ambedkar 1992, 123, 217, 345-7, 597).

2. In a different take on the concept of religion, in 'The Philosophy of Hinduism', Ambedkar does not look at religion from the point of view of orientation, but from the angle of justification of actions. His concerns were the criteria or norms 'for judging what is right and what is wrong' underlying societies and the 'philosophies' of each religion.⁶³ He distinguishes between the criteria or norms of utility and of justice,

depending on whether society or the individual is the end and stands at the centre of the divine order **(p.395)** (Ambedkar 1987b, 21f). Adapting John Stuart Mill's consequentialist ethical theory, Ambedkar reads this on the background of a theory of development of religion that he takes in large parts from William Robertson Smith.⁶⁴ According to Ambedkar—after a first stage of 'savage' society, in which 'there is no trace of God' and 'no bond between morality and Religion' (Ambedkar 1987b, 12)⁶⁵—a form of religion (which he calls the religions of ancient or antique society) developed, in which the welfare of society was the end and which was indifferent to the welfare of the individual (Ambedkar 1987b, 20). This later was replaced (Ambedkar talks of a revolution, focussing on its internal dimension) by a form of religion (which he calls the religions of 'modern' society⁶⁶), in which all 'men' are equal and the individual and his/her welfare are at the centre, the 'moral good' being justice to the individual (21, 22, 25). From here he sheds new light on Hinduism. For him the only religion that does not fit this scheme is Hinduism with the Manusmriti as its core text, neither the individual nor society being at the centre here, but merely one class of people, Brahmins (72). Hinduism fails on both the criterion of utility (that applies to the ancient religions focused on society) and the criterion of justice (that applies to 'modern' religions focussing on the individual) (Ambedkar 1987b, 22, 71f). The philosophy of Hinduism, which makes inequality 'a religious doctrine', is 'a direct denial of fraternity' (Ambedkar 1987b, 66).

(p.396) 3. In *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, while he continues with the distinction between true and untrue forms of religion, Ambedkar shifts terminology at various instances and twists the application of terms. While we occasionally find him repeating the idea of 'the only real religion', now applied to Buddhism (Ambedkar 1992, 452), at many other instances dhamma, the teaching of the Buddha, does no more fall under religion for him, but appears as only 'analogous' to the 'European' concept of religion (Ambedkar 1992, 316). Going beyond his earlier statements on religion, he now questions the religious focus on God, even if God is conceived as universal God, and detaches ethics from belief in God. Dhamma, standing for morality and thus representing what is, or should be, true in religion, stands in opposition to (the other) religions with their fixation on God: 'Morality is Dhamma and Dhamma is Morality. In other words, in Dhamma morality takes the place of God although there is no God in Dhamma' (Ambedkar 1992, 322). Other religions, or religions *tout court*, pay only limited attention to morality:⁶⁷ 'Morality comes into religion as a side wind to maintain peace and order. ... Every religion preaches morality but morality is not the root of religion. It is a wagon attached to it. It is attached and detached as the occasion requires'; or even stronger: '... [M]orality has no place in Religion. The content of religion consists of God, soul, prayers, worship, rituals,

ceremonies and sacrifices' (Ambedkar 1992, 322). It is the relationship between humans on which morality has to centre: 'Morality in Dhamma arises from the direct necessity for man to love man. It does not require the sanction of God. It is not to please God that man has to be moral. It is for his own good that man has to love man' (Ambedkar 1992, 323). Ambedkar's renderings of Buddha's insights and teachings look like a very modern concept of religion, a post-religious religion (Fuchs 2001, 261). Ambedkar pushes God to the side, as well as religion in a conventional sense of the term. But what he emphatically holds on to is that morality was a 'necessity' and 'had to be sacred'. Ambedkar deems it absolutely necessary that morality, to be socially accepted and valid, is made or regarded as not just universal but as **(p.397)** sacred. Morality is required 'to protect the weak', who often also are 'the best'; this morality has to be made into 'common standards' or 'rules' that are 'sacred to all'; and this morality has 'to safeguard the growth of the individual' (Ambedkar 1992, 323-5).

It is then not just the case that dhamma, or Buddhist religion, is itself man-made, but rather that morality, locked-in with the actions of humans, requires special esteem. As a principle it is inviolable, but it is to be realized in the everyday interactions of humans and in their attitudes towards each other. Religion in the sense of dhamma is for us humans to help us organize, and thus revolutionize, our social coexistence: 'The purpose of Religion is to explain the origin of the world. The purpose of Dhamma is to reconstruct the world' (Ambedkar 1992, 322).⁶⁸

In an unconventional way in his last work, his opus magnum, Ambedkar has made use of what cannot be but Durkheim's conception of religion. Taking the distinction between sacred and profane, and even referring to the notion of taboo (Ambedkar 1992, 323), the theory of sacredness provides for Ambedkar the final argument to declare ethics 'holy', and make the sacred, true religion, the sanctuary of universal ethics. While there is little direct reference to Durkheim in Ambedkar, I agree with Gail Omvedt, the first and perhaps only one to have pointed this out before, that Ambedkar's statement at this point 'almost echoed Durkheim' (Omvedt 2003, 260⁶⁹). The reference would be to chapter one of Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, in which he introduces the binary of sacred and profane as the defining concept of religion (1964, 37).⁷⁰ **(p.398)** Moreover, Durkheim, in the same context, had also pointed out that the definition of religion through the notion of the sacred allows for the inclusion of religions like Buddhism, which are not defined by belief in God (1964, 37).

Taking the systematic role of the concept of the sacred for Ambedkar's concept of universal morality as religion, one should, however, also be clear about the differences between Ambedkar and Durkheim. Ambedkar saw morality as a social phenomenon like Durkheim, as both also saw morality and religion as closely linked. However, Durkheim saw morality as society-specific and socially

and historically conditioned; Durkheim was less interested in universal morality for humanity. For Ambedkar, on the other hand, it is not so much morality as such that is social (in the sense of contextually shared), but it is morality (in the sense of universalist principles) that constitutes the social (in the sense of fellow feeling). Thus, the different religions are not the same typologically, not species of the same kind, but differ on principle: not all religions contribute to the same extent to the constitution of sociality.

Reason and Ethics

The underlying concept of religion is a social one. Ambedkar considers the idea of religion as an individual, private, and ‘purely personal matter between man and God’, which he calls ‘supernatural’, one-sided, being based on aspects of religion that are ‘purely historical and not fundamental’ (1989b, 406, 409).⁷¹ Religion is social, both functionally, like language—‘essential for social life[,] and the individual has to have it because without it he cannot participate in the life of society’—and with regard to its main message, the ‘primary content of religion’, emphasizing and even ‘universalizing’ social values (Ambedkar 1989b, 407, 409).

(p.399) Buddhism came for Ambedkar to best express the human, which means social, condition and its conversion into societal values. Buddhism had already enshrined what later thinkers, supporters of religions as well as social philosophers, formulated in new ways, but what then either became an aspect of secondary relevance, an add-on, a ‘wagon attached’ (to religion), or lost its sacred anchorage altogether. At the same time, the pointed way in which Ambedkar presented the argument brought into sharp relief the ambivalent status of this plea for social ethics. Social ethics, or morality, denotes a ‘necessity’—‘the direct necessity for man to love man’ (Ambedkar 1992, 323)—a requirement for humans to live by, if they want a life beyond the barbaric state. On the other hand, conviviality, sociality is not a given. Humans have to work for it, have to practice togetherness, compassion, fellow feeling. Implicitly Ambedkar follows up on the figure of a *contrat social*: Morality, as we saw, required to protect ‘the weak’, who often also are ‘the best’, has to be made into ‘common rules’ ‘sacred to all’ (Ambedkar 1992, 323–5). As previously mentioned, twenty years earlier already Ambedkar had approvingly quoted John Stuart Mill declaring that the ‘social state’, on which the sentiment of fellow or social feeling builds, is ‘natural’, ‘habitual’ as well as ‘necessary’. The assumption that humans are equal leads to both, individualism and ‘the understanding that the interests of all are to be regarded equally’, as the two contrary but co-present consequences (Mill 1910, 29, quoted in Ambedkar 1987b, 44). ‘Individualism would produce anarchy. It is only fraternity which prevents it and helps to sustain the moral order among men’ (Ambedkar 1987b, 44). While he takes individualism as a given, Ambedkar emphasizes that fraternity, although considered as ‘natural’ state, has to be realized: ‘The sentiment of fraternity as

Mill said is natural but it is a plant which grows only where the soil is propitious and the conditions for its growth exist' (Ambedkar 1987b, 64).

Finally, one should not forget one aspect that is of highest importance for Ambedkar. It is his insistence that the argument for sociality is not just ethical or moral, but essentially rational, based on reason. Fellow feeling for Ambedkar derives logically from the notion of the human, and Buddhism in the form taught by the Buddha especially is completely rational: 'If there is anything which could be said with confidence it is: He [the Buddha; MF] was **(p.400)** nothing if not rational, if not logical. Anything therefore which is rational and logical, other things being equal, may be taken to be the word of the Buddha' (Ambedkar 1992, 350f).⁷² Not to practice a humanist religion and ethics would not only be immoral, but also against reason. It is the force of reason, and not force in the sense of coercion, on which his politics and his hopes build. Using reason excludes immorality.

Spread across *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, one finds references to reason, rationality or rationalism, and *prajna*, which Ambedkar translates as intelligence and understanding.⁷³ He designates the teaching of the Buddha as 'the path of rationalism' (Ambedkar 1992, 250) or 'the path of reason' (Ambedkar 1992, 114), or just plainly: 'Buddhism is nothing if not rationalism' (Ambedkar 1992, 250). He combines philosophical ideas of rational argument with scientific ideas of investigation and proof (Ambedkar 1992, 75, 217, 398).⁷⁴ He uses the insistence on reason, for example, in arguing against the persuasiveness of one of the central narratives of traditional Buddhism, the explanation of why the Buddha left home (namely that he for the first time saw a sick, dead and old person respectively; Ambedkar 1992, 'Introduction').

Ambedkar's plea for a 'moral regeneration' requires beforehand 'an intellectual regeneration' and 'intellectual emancipation' (Ambedkar 1989a, 94). However, he himself (rationally) recognizes that rationalist arguments, logical as well as moral insights, require emotional support: the growth of the sentiment of fraternity 'lies in sharing in the vital processes of life, ... sharing in the joys and sorrows of birth, death, marriage and food' (Ambedkar 1987b, 64).

(p.401) *Sunyata: Ontology of Transcendence and Becoming*

The role and centrality of reason for (true) religion, dhamma, shows in another regard also: the stipulation that a religion has to regularly check on its teachings. Ambedkar claims that the Buddha applied this argument self-referentially also to his own teachings. 'He [the Buddha] never claimed infallibility for his message.'⁷⁵ He said that it was open to anyone to question it, test it, and find what truth it contained. No founder has so fully thrown open his religion to such a challenge' (Ambedkar 1992, 222). '... His religion', Ambedkar claims the Buddha to have said, 'was based on reason and experience and ... his followers should not accept his teaching as correct and binding merely because

they emanated from Him. Being based on reason and experience they were free to modify or even to abandon any of his teachings if it was found that at a given time and in given circumstances they do not apply' (Ambedkar 2003a [1950], 98).

What looks like a pragmatist version of rationalism further gets an ontological underpinning, again probably not uninfluenced by Dewey's pragmatist philosophy. Taking the concept of sunyata (Skr.) or sunnata (Pali), which he understands as 'doctrine of impermanence', Ambedkar advances his notion of constant change beyond the sphere of the social towards a general emergentist theory. Not only do changes of circumstances mean that even insights built on reason require to be constantly revisited. It is the impermanence of things as well as of each living individual (a human being 'is not the same at two different moments in life'), which creates new and unforeseen possibilities: '... being is becoming' (Ambedkar 1992, 240). 'Very few realize that it is on account of Sunnyata that everything becomes possible; without it nothing in the world would be possible. It is on the impermanence of the nature of all things that the possibility of all other things depends' (Ambedkar 1992, 241). Sociologically speaking, this seems a very advanced idea of social hermeneutics, of practical creativity, and of the latency of possibilities inherent in (routine) praxis. As I have shown earlier (Fuchs 2001), the parallels to John (p.402) Dewey, even if not literal in this case, are rather striking. As Dewey stated in his book on religion, *A Common Faith*, of which it is not clear whether Ambedkar had read it, a 'new vision ... emerges through seeing, in terms of possibilities, that is of imagination, old things in new relations serving a new end which the new end aids in creating' (Dewey 2013 [1934], 46).⁷⁶ The human condition is more than the world of necessity and of inequality—a belief in transcendence that is both imminent and immanent.⁷⁷

Meanings of Conversion

It thus becomes more transparent what conversion meant for Ambedkar and what he sought in a new religion: a complete overhaul, a new, or renewed, holistic vision. Conversion from Hinduism for him was to achieve a 'complete change of values of life' (Ambedkar 1989a, 78). The whole idea of conversion is highly contentious in India, and was so already in Ambedkar's days. Ambedkar became a major target of critique, often for a (deliberate) misunderstanding of his project. Conversion, intentional transformation, for Ambedkar stood for 'new life', the exchange of the old for a new body (Ambedkar 1989a, 78). Conversion for Ambedkar was based on decisions to be taken by each individual, but his interest lay not in individual spiritual change alone, it lay in the transformation of social life. Again there are two aspects. The final goal is the complete (self-)transformation or 'remoulding' of a whole way of life, of outlook, attitude and values applied to society as a whole, and thus to all its members, and in that sense referring to society's religious-moral basis. Changing one's religion, shifting allegiance from one to another religion, typically by an individual or by a

smaller or larger group, without transforming the religious-moral basis of society as a whole, is a more limited goal; it **(p.403)** has to be seen against the larger background. For Ambedkar, conversion in this confined sense became necessary because he could not see the possibility of an overall turn-around of Hindu society. He had hoped for signs that the wider goal could stepwise be achieved; the Yeola speech on 13 October 1935 and the publication of *Annihilation of Caste* in the following year marked the point of resignation at which he changed gears.

The reflections that went into Ambedkar's final project of conversion to a non-Hindu religion are highly complex. I can touch on just some salient dimensions. He was adamant that the decision to convert was an active choice, and search, and therefore absolutely 'genuine'. As such, there was no reason why it had to be individual, and even less so, private, as Gandhi especially insisted upon (Ambedkar 1989b, 404f, 407, 409). Decisive is the criterion for the religion to be chosen: not religion as an individual path towards salvation, but religion understood as social, and this in two senses of the term, as promoting a universalist idea of humanness and sociality, and as a collective, shared, and not an individual endeavour. In the sense of the confined idea of conversion, this for Ambedkar was to secure a sense of brotherhood within the new community; community represents for Ambedkar what society cannot give, a feeling of kinship (see his comparison of the two terms; 1989b, 416). At the same time, even while acknowledging the ambiguity of a change of one's name (1989b, 419f), conversion was intended by him to gain respect (from others) as well as from and for oneself, in the form of self-respect (1989b, 412).

Ambedkar was completely aware of the inherent difficulties even of the confined version of conversion. The difficulties were mainly two: on the one hand, sociologically speaking, one's religion is not completely one's own choice: others have to accept it, as Gandhi made clear in no uncertain terms.⁷⁸ But this works both ways: unilateral **(p.404)** dependence was exactly what Ambedkar wanted to overcome. This was reflected in the other difficulty. Conversion conventionally assumes that one is a full member of the religion or belief system that one wants to leave. Concerning Dalits, also in Ambedkar's eyes this was not all too clear. While there are many instances in which he includes Untouchables with Hindus (and then uses the qualifier 'caste Hindus' for the non-Untouchables), at other moments he often emphatically talks of Hindus as the Dalits' or Untouchables' *others* (Ambedkar 1989a; Ambedkar 1936/2003d).⁷⁹ At several occasions Ambedkar describes Hinduism as having been imposed on Untouchables, and Untouchables having 'no particular affinity to the Hindu faith' (1989c, 422; Ambedkar 1936⁸⁰). In that sense then his and his followers' decision was not to leave behind something to which they belonged, but rather it was not to be fully drawn into what had always alienated them, and to reject being guided, directed and determined (being told what things to do) by others: an Untouchable 'cannot be expected to give an admission that he is an Untouchable' and that this is 'the

result of Divine dispensation' (Ambedkar 1989b, 412). Conversion meant to keep one's own agency and one's own identity (and one's own, even if transformed, cultural legacy).⁸¹ Joining a new religion had to be on one's own terms. Therefore, Ambedkar also did not accept the authority of the traditional leaders of the chosen religion at face value—he rather put them under scrutiny. The intellectual representatives of the new religion, in this case the bhikkhus, had to be servants of their religion and of the social community, not the profiteers of it. While it actually were the bhikkhus who were supposed to propagate Buddhism and convert others (Ambedkar 2003a, 107; Ambedkar 1992, 'Introduction', 439–47), Ambedkar felt Dalits **(p.405)** had to take conversion into their own hands, starting with the change of religion, and working for the change of society.⁸²

The final ambivalence concerns the scope of Ambedkar's drive for conversion: transformation of all, or of the Untouchables (Dalits) 'only'? *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, his last work, is meant for all humans; it is universalist in the fullest sense of the term. Buddhism, as he saw it, was not an identitarian religion; Ambedkar had at several points expressed his scepticism of identity and identity politics. But the project, and the act of conversion itself, could, under the circumstances, only be a project of Dalits, or even just the members of his own caste, the Mahars, themselves. It had not been an option to lead larger sections of Indians onto this path. Nor were others in any way willing to join this act of transformation. It was thus the Dalits who embodied the universals, the basic truths, the possible future, and a culture of liberation. Conversion was meant as an idea of an inclusive, total project, which, however, remained caught in the social and political restrictions it fought against.

In Search of a Ground of Universality

Ambedkar was not satisfied with developing a critical social theory of the society he was part of and of restricting himself to the analysis and understanding of social mechanisms. Nor, it seems, was he satisfied with a critique of inequalities that simply relates to humanist values announcing his belief in the values of liberty, equality, and, especially, fraternity. He seemed to require a stronger basis of argument and a stronger basis for the norms he defended, a ground of universality that represents the basic axes of human existence and allows for evaluating concrete forms of life, and that thus can be used to define basic norms. Identifying Buddhism as the site where **(p.406)** these are enshrined allowed him a firm ground to stand on, a ground that cannot easily be disputed. Ambedkar avoided the relativistic quandary in which the majority of Hindu reformers of his time were trapped, the struggle between 'Western' and 'Indian' values, modern and traditional civilization, 'their' and 'our' traditions (and reciprocal claims of the pre-eminence of one's own). To celebrate religious plurality and tolerance meant for him nothing but reinforcing the dilemma. Uncritical acceptance of plurality means indifference and prevents one from realizing human universals. It means confirming traditions (in the name of assertion of one's separate identity), even if these are unacceptable (Ambedkar

1989a, 91; Ambedkar 2003a, 102). Ambedkar did not have to look outside India for a universalist and humanist alternative. He found it, and in actual fact the strongest possible version, on his own turf—and how, otherwise, could anything be universal if nothing of this would be found in India with its long and highly diverse religious history? In addition, establishing a special connection of those considered Untouchables to this universalist strand allowed him excavate a positive identity for Dalits.

While starting from universalism within Indian traditions, Ambedkar did not consider India as the sole owner of true universalism. Instead, he saw universalism, while best expressed by Buddhism, as derived from the premises of human, which for him instantly meant social, existence. These were reformulated in the form of modern humanist ideas, but shades of these can be found in many traditions. Ambedkar built on ontological assumptions regarding human nature and the nature, if one can say so, of sociality. In a way, rediscovering the natural law background of sociology (Chernilo 2013; 2014), certain capabilities were considered as inhering in human nature, to be discovered by reason and to be realized by religion, or dhamma, respectively. Furthermore, he makes the claim that it is only Buddhism that can fully realize the core values in modern times, without neglecting one of them: the French Revolution articulated these values, but ‘failed to produce equality’; the Russian Revolution produced equality, but sacrificed fraternity and liberty: ‘... the three can coexist only if one follows the way of the Buddha’ (Ambedkar 1987a, 462).

One can see in Ambedkar’s thought on sociality and on the role of religion a confluence of at least three streams—besides traces of natural law traditions, pragmatist sociology and philosophy **(p.407)** and Buddhist ethics, ontology, and epistemics—all three sharing a (quasi-)transcendental grounding. It is the respect, feeling, love for one’s others—*reciprocal recognition* of the other—that is (at) the core of what it means to be human. Briefly alluding to Aristotle, but actually expressing a core concept of pragmatism, namely that of primary sociality,⁸³ Ambedkar emphasizes that social relationships, and more specifically social recognition—‘the recognition of others and their interests’—are ‘intrinsic’ to the life and purposes of the individual: ‘... it is impossible for any one to begin life as an individualist in the sense of radically separating himself from his social fellows. The social bond is established and rooted in the very growth of self-consciousness’ (1989c, 424).⁸⁴

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Notes:

(¹) This chapter owes a lot to discussions with Valerian Rodrigues. Special thanks also to Antje Linkenbach and Vasudha Dalmia, who carefully read and commented the draft of this chapter. Thanks also to the participants of the Erfurt conference and of the colloquium at the Max-Weber-Kolleg, Erfurt, Germany, where I presented the chapter, for their comments.

(²) On the rediscovery of Buddhism in India, see Aloysius (1998, 20–2); Zelliott (1979).

(³) G. Aloysius in particular was responsible for the recovery of Iyothée Thass's work and influence (see in English especially Aloysius 1998). See also Geetha and Rajadurai (1998).

(⁴) Ambedkar could not read Thass's Tamil writings. For partial comparisons between the two, see besides Aloysius also Bergunder (2004) and Geetha (2014).

(⁵) In cases like the formation of the Brahmo or the Arya Samaj, the driving force was the critique of those traditions one felt connected to. This sometimes was accompanied by a critique of other religious traditions, such as Jainism and Buddhism (see Vasudha Dalmia in this volume).

(⁶) Cf. Rodrigues (1994).

(⁷) Regarding Ambedkar's analysis of the entanglement of the subordination of women and caste through control of women's sexuality (Ambedkar 1989d), see Rao (2009, 125) and Rege (2006, 56f).

(⁸) During the lead-up to Ambedkar's 125th birth anniversary on 14 April 2016, the political appropriation of Ambedkar as figure and symbol from outside Dalit contexts, most prominently by the Hindu right, reached a new and unusual height.

(⁹) I agree with Christopher Queen (1994; 2004) who sees Ambedkar's interpretation as part of the hermeneutic history of Buddhism. Ambedkar formulated his own critical hermeneutic criteria (Rodrigues 1993, 310–2).

(¹⁰) I thus differ from D.R. Nagaraj (1993, 58) who asserted that Ambedkar's book on Buddhism, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, reveals his 'tiredness with the social science mode of reasoning' that had guided him earlier. Valerian Rodrigues, in contrast (1994, 143f), underlines the importance of the social sciences for Ambedkar. Rodrigues (1993) points to Fabianism besides John Dewey as influence on Ambedkar.

(¹¹) 'Sociology' here taken as shorthand for the conceptualization of society and the social more generally.

(¹²) It seems, Ambedkar first used the term *Dalit* in 1928 in his journal *Bahishkrit Bharat* (Outcaste/Boycotted India), ‘where he characterized being Dalit as the experience of deprivation, marginalization, and stigmatization’ (Rao 2009, 15). The term gained prominence from the 1970s onwards.

(¹³) Long regarded as negligible, the significance of Dewey for Ambedkar is slowly getting more sustained, but still uneven scholarly recognition (for example, Fuchs 2001; Kadam 1994 and 1997; Kumar 2015; Mukherjee 2009; Nanda 2001; Queen 2004; Rodrigues 1993, 1994, and 2002; Škof 2011; Stroud 2016). What remains a desideratum is a systematic comparison of Dewey’s and Ambedkar’s social philosophies and their respective emphases. References to Dewey are not always advertised by Ambedkar and not all have so far been revealed (cf. Mukherjee 2009).

(¹⁴) Weber actually pointed to the duality of interests, that is, material and ideal interests (2004a, 69).

(¹⁵) Distinguishing three meanings of conduct, Ambedkar’s main concern lies with the second one, ‘conduct regulated by standards of society’:

Wherever groups of men are living there are certain ways of acting which are common to the group—“folkways”. There are *approved* ways of acting, common to a group, and handed down from generation to generation. [...] The welfare of the group is regarded as in some sense imbedded in them. It becomes the duty of the individual to follow them We cannot strictly speaking call the conduct moral. Because the end is accepted as a standard of “good” prescribed by society. ... it conforms to the mores and morals of the Society. It may be called customary morality.

He, however, values particularly the third level of conduct, ‘conduct regulated by individual conscience’, ‘which alone is truly and completely moral. That is because the individual *recognizes* the right or *chooses* the good ... and becomes personally responsible. His is reflective morality’ (Ambedkar 1987b, 82f; emphases Ambedkar).

(¹⁶) Ambedkar 1989a, 73; for a discussion of this statement, see below.

(¹⁷) In *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Ambedkar puts highest emphasis on the training of ‘man’s instincts and dispositions’, see below.

(¹⁸) John Dewey himself, following on William James, preferred the term ‘habit’, appropriately understood (as denoting acquisition by prior activity, systematization of minor elements of action, projective character, operativeness, actuality), but also uses the terms ‘disposition’ and ‘attitude’: ‘Attitude and ... disposition suggest something latent, potential, something which requires a

positive stimulus outside themselves to become active'; it also means 'predisposition' (Dewey 2002b [1922], 40f; cf. Dewey 2002a [1916], 13, 379).

(¹⁹) This shows certain similarities with John Dewey (2013 [1934], 21f, 41, 45).

(²⁰) Compare this with Max Weber's famous image of switches shaping civilizational developments: '... [T]he "worldviews" that have been created by ideas have very often, like switches, decided the lines on which the dynamic of interests has propelled behaviour' (Weber 2004a, 69). The context of Weber's statement shows that what he has in mind are religious ideas and worldviews in particular.

(²¹) In a somewhat different way, Gopal Guru (2015) distinguishes between two conceptions of moral idealism in Ambedkar.

(²²) Some of Taylor's notions come especially close to Ambedkar's thoughts: 'The social imaginary is not a set of ideas; rather it is what enables, through making sense of, the practices of a society' (Taylor 2002: 91). Social imaginaries refer to 'a sense or an idea of moral order' implicit in people's views and actions (93, 106, 109): 'I am thinking', writes Taylor, 'of the ways in which people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations' (106). The social imaginary refers to such presuppositions of action and interaction that are quasi-intuitively reproduced in everyday life and that one cannot think beyond, 'an implicit map of social space', or of knowing how to do things (107, 108). Such imaginaries are not usually formulated in theoretical terms, but are articulated through images, through stories or through legends (106). On a deeper level, again, Taylor sees the imaginaries grounded in basic assumptions about the world and how it is constituted, that is, of notions of a 'moral or metaphysical order' 'beyond' the 'immediate background' (107).

(²³) While Weber resembles Ambedkar in taking Brahmins and bhikkhus as the carriers of the respective religions, his characterization of their interests somewhat differs. Weber's analysis of *Hinduism und Buddhismus* covers vol. II of Weber 1920/21. The English translation of that volume, under the somewhat misleading title *Religion of India* (Weber 1958), is inaccurate in many parts. For a discussion of Weber's study of India, see Fuchs (1988) and Fuchs (2017b).

(²⁴) Ambedkar mainly referred to the Sutta and Vinaya Pitaka, Dhammapada, Buddhacharita, Pali commentaries and the Milinda-panha (Ahir 1994, 10). For details, see the references in the new 'critical' edition of *The Buddha and His Dhamma* (Ambedkar 2011). Among the modern writers and scholars he read, we know of Thomas Rhys Davids, Edwin Arnold, Lakshmi Narasu, Dharmanand

Kosambi, and K.A. Kerluskar. See also Ambedkar (2011, 313f) and Queen (2004, 134f) regarding the works, as so far known, that he consulted.

(²⁵) For comparisons of the political philosophies of Gramsci and Ambedkar, see Zene (2013).

(²⁶) Ambedkar makes a reference here to Dewey (2002a [1916], 370).

(²⁷) The notion of social efficiency appears in Dewey (2002a [1916], 109, 138–44): ‘Social efficiency is attained not by negative constraint but by positive use of native individual capacities in occupations having a social meaning’ (139). Ambedkar in *Annihilation of Caste*, 47, adapts a section of Dewey (2002a, 139f). See also Mukherjee (2009).

(²⁸) Giddings (1896, 17 et passim); reference first pointed out by S. Anand in his annotations to the critical edition of *Annihilation of Caste* (Ambedkar 2014, 242n52).

(²⁹) Concerning ‘Philosophy of Hinduism’, an unpublished text discovered among Ambedkar’s manuscripts after his death, the editors of his writings do not provide any clue regarding the time at which he might have had worked on this text. Academic works he refers to in the text (without full details, but whose publication dates are detectable in contemporary online catalogues) as well as certain topical and semantic similarities (see especially ‘Philosophy of Hinduism’, 67–71, 79) might suggest that he had worked on this text around (either before or after) the time at which he wrote *Annihilation of Caste*, that is, in the second half of the 1930s. Kumar (2015, 142) claims that ‘Philosophy of Hinduism’ was written after *Annihilation of Caste* and made use of key passages of the latter.

(³⁰) Ambedkar’s recurrent conceptual formula for the caste order (for example, see also Ambedkar 1990b, 170, 215).

(³¹) The expressions ‘interests “of its own”’ of a group and ‘anti-social spirit’ have been already used in Dewey 2002a [1916], 99.

(³²) *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, on which he worked until his death, remained unfinished and was published posthumously in 1957.

(³³) Ananya Vajpeyi (2012, ch. 5) makes this the key to Ambedkar’s reading of the early texts of Indian Buddhism. She regards all other considerations on Ambedkar’s side as secondary.

(³⁴) ‘... The Buddha’s conception of *Dukkha*’, he claims, ‘is material’ (511). *Dukkha*, as Ambedkar knew, originally meant unrest and only later acquired the meaning of sorrow and suffering (510).

(³⁵) While he determines the two opposing classes in these contexts as masters and slaves, owners and workers (Ambedkar 1992, 325), the more frequent use of the term class in *The Buddha and His Dhamma* refers to the four varnas.

(³⁶) Karl Marx is mentioned twice in *The Buddha and His Dhamma* (226, 512). In 'Buddha or Karl Marx' (1987a), Ambedkar criticizes Marxism for a one-sided economic interpretation of history, the idea of the inevitability of socialism, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the idea of the withering away of the state, the danger of sacrificing fraternity or liberty for equality, and the indiscriminate use of violence, of destruction of human life, and of other values (cf. Rodrigues 2002, 24).

(³⁷) For Ambedkar, the Buddhist concept of kamma (Pali) stands for 'man's action' and the law of causation (in the present world); morally good or bad action decides the moral quality of society and the world at large (Ambedkar 1992, 243–5, 250). See also below.

(³⁸) 'The Buddha then told them that according to his Dhamma if every person followed (1) the Path of Purity; (2) the Path of Righteousness; and (3) the Path of Virtue, it would bring about the end of all suffering' (Ambedkar 1992, 122).

(³⁹) *Dharma* points in a prototypical fashion to the combination of religious and juridical power.

(⁴⁰) 'Routine habits are unthinking habits' (Dewey 2002a [1916], 58).

(⁴¹) See, for example, Joas (1996, 128f); Pettenkofer (2010, 133–45).

(⁴²) 'Sanatan' refers to *sanatan dharma*, eternal dharma or eternal order, a concept that came into vogue in the second half of the nineteenth century. From then on, increasingly, various prominent Hindus, amongst them Gandhi, regarded themselves as 'sanatanis'.

(⁴³) He, for example, saw achievements of modernization, including industrialization, from the perspective of how this could help liberate people from the control of dominant castes in villages.—Valerian Rodrigues sees a change in Ambedkar from an originally teleological to a more ontologically argued position later (Rodrigues 2002, 18f).

(⁴⁴)

Ambedkar illustrates this by employing a metaphor which he takes from John Stuart Mill:

The sentiment of fraternity as [John Stuart] Mill said is natural but it is a plant, which grows only where the soil is propitious and the conditions for its growth exist. The fundamental condition for the growth of the sentiment

of fraternity is not preaching that we are children of God or the realisation that one's life is dependent upon others. It is too rational to give rise to a sentiment. The condition for the growth of this sentiment of fraternity lies in sharing in the vital processes of life. It is sharing in the joys and sorrows of birth, death, marriage and food. Those who participate in these come to feel as brothers. (Ambedkar 1987b, 64)

(⁴⁵) For example, Dewey (2013 [1934], 75 et passim).

(⁴⁶) The importance maitri started to gain for Ambedkar has been pointed out recently also by Geetha (2016).

(⁴⁷) He takes this from John Stuart Mill's *Utilitarianism* (orig. 1861, republished in 1910 as the first of three essays).

(⁴⁸) Elsewhere he calls equality, even if it may be a fiction, 'the governing principle' (Ambedkar 1989a, 58).

(⁴⁹) Ambedkar takes this term from John Dewey (see Dewey 2002a [1916], 98, who seems to have used the term only once). According to Arun Mukherjee (2009, 352), the term was originally used by Henri Bergson and later by William James. Mukherjee discusses the use of the term by both Dewey and Ambedkar; the latter used it at several instances, extensively.

(⁵⁰) '... Society continues to exist by communication[,] indeed in communication' (Ambedkar 1989a, 51; similar Dewey 2002a [1916], 5; cf. Dewey 2002a [1916], 96 and 101).

(⁵¹) The first two sentences of the quote Ambedkar took from Dewey (2002a [1916], 101).

(⁵²) Actually Ambedkar opts for 'Dhamma plus Magistrate' (Ambedkar 1992, 317), which could translate as social ethics, built on Buddhist ideas, together with the rule of law and the Constitution, the other large project Ambedkar was heavily involved with. Both seemingly very different enterprises were in Ambedkar's views meant to essentially support each other: The Constitution was meant to provide the legal frame of (social) cohabitation, while Buddhism would teach the values, actions and attitudes that (are to) lie at the heart of human relationships, indispensable to create a good life and generate notions of the common good.

(⁵³) Cf. Fuchs (2001, 259).

(⁵⁴) He stated on 13 October 1935, in a speech held at Yeola (Maharashtra): 'I solemnly assure you that I will not die a Hindu' (Ambedkar 2003c, 95; cf. Keer 1990, 253).

⁽⁵⁵⁾ So far the source of this quote has not been located. The editor of the annotated critical edition of *Annihilation of Caste*, S. Anand, identified an almost identically worded citation from Burke in O'Brien (1947, 191); see Ambedkar (2014, 307n158). Compare Burke (1910, 87), where Burke states that 'religion is the basis of civil society, and the source of all good and of all comfort'.

⁽⁵⁶⁾ Ambedkar, other Dalit leaders, and large groups of Dalit followers explored and debated the different options available with particular intensity during the second half of the 1930s and engaged in this regard with representatives of various religious groups as well as with prominent Hindu leaders. The option considered most was Sikhism (Keer 1990, 277–84, 299–300; Zelliott 2004, 161–9). Regarding Christianity, Ambedkar took into account the effects of earlier Dalit conversion to this religion. He expressed his dissatisfaction with the continuation of caste practices among south Indian Christians and criticized Indian Christians, including Dalit Christians, for never fighting as a community for the redress of social wrongs (Ambedkar 1989e, 454–6, 471–3).

⁽⁵⁷⁾ Being speculative, the Upanishads had no 'influence on Hinduism as a social and political system' and in this sense were 'ineffective' (Ambedkar 1987b, 86). The Upanishads would probably require 'a complete remoulding, a considerable scraping and chipping off the ore they contain' (Ambedkar 1989a, 78). Later, Ambedkar disputed the reality of brahman (Ambedkar 1992, 93).

⁽⁵⁸⁾ Though Kabir and Ramanujan had worked for the abolition of caste and untouchability, he dismissed their example as being of any value in the present, since in his eyes it was practically impossible to 'appeal to the acts of these reformers and exhort the Hindus to follow them' (Ambedkar 1989a, 74). Jon Keune quotes a letter in which Ambedkar, different from his usual dismissive stance, expressed a sense of appreciation for Marathi *sant* literature (Keune, 2011, 207, 370f). *Mook Nayak*, the newspaper Ambedkar launched in 1920, had verses of Tukaram in its masthead (Zelliott 2001, 11; cf. Jaffrelot 2005, 48). Moreover, Ambedkar dedicated his book *The Untouchables* (1990a [1948]) to Nand(a)nar, Ravidas, and Chokhamela.

⁽⁵⁹⁾ In the altercation with Gandhi following the publication of *Annihilation of Caste*, Ambedkar makes clear why in his view the position of bhakti saints like Jnyandeo (Jnaneswar) and Eknath was inadequate: they never attacked the caste system and 'did not preach that all men were equal'—they only 'preached that all men were equal in the eyes of God'; second, 'the masses' were told 'that a saint might break Caste but the common man must not' (Ambedkar 1989a, 87f). Keer (1990, 109) reports similar statements made by Ambedkar already in 1928 at Trymbak. Ambedkar also objected to Untouchables revering Chokhamela (Keer 1992, 109, 248; cf. Jaffrelot 2005, 48).

⁽⁶⁰⁾ There are passages in ‘The Philosophy of Hinduism’ which repeat (or anticipate?) arguments first articulated publicly by Ambedkar in *Annihilation of Caste*, for example, concerning the ‘division of labourers’, the ‘social inefficiency’ of the caste system, the lack of freedom to change and choose one’s occupations, or the reasons why the lower classes in India did not rebel (Ambedkar 1987b, 67–71; cf. Ambedkar 1989a, 47f, 62f). Also see fn. 29.

⁽⁶¹⁾ Dewey discusses rules and principles in a somewhat similar vein in 2002b [1922], 238–47.

⁽⁶²⁾ Ambedkar obviously combines different meanings of ‘rule’, later distinguished by Ludwig Wittgenstein and Pierre Bourdieu. Ambedkar thus clubs together ordinances and rites (Ambedkar 1989a, 75).

⁽⁶³⁾ Ambedkar takes the concept of philosophy of religion from Andrew Seth Pringle-Pattison (1930) but claims that he uses it in a different sense (Ambedkar 1987b, 5).

⁽⁶⁴⁾ Ambedkar refers especially to J.S. Mill’s *Utilitarianism* and to W.R. Smith’s [Lectures on] [t]he Religion of the Semites[: the Fundamental Institutions] (1927).

⁽⁶⁵⁾ Here Ambedkar also refers to (probably Alfred Ernest) Crawley, no title (perhaps *The Origin and Function of Religion*, 1907). Kumar (2015, 142) points out that in emphasizing the bond between morality and religion Ambedkar was also influenced by Henri Bergson’s *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*.

⁽⁶⁶⁾ This does not mean modern in our sense of the term, but applies to all religions in which God is no longer seen as member of the community, has become a universal God and the creator of the universe, and ‘man has become a responsible person required to justify his belief in God’s commandments’ (Ambedkar 1987b, 15, 21). There are overlaps with the concept of axial age or an axial breakthrough.

⁽⁶⁷⁾ Thereby Ambedkar differentiates the general statement regarding the bond between morality and religion that he made in ‘The Philosophy of Hinduism’.

⁽⁶⁸⁾ Here and in other instances, Ambedkar plays around with Marx’ eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, replacing Marx’s reference to philosophy with reference to religion or Buddhism respectively (cf. Ambedkar 1987a, 443; Ambedkar 1992, 112, 322). The English translation of Marx’s eleventh thesis reads: ‘The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the task is to change it.’

⁽⁶⁹⁾ See also Omvedt (2004). I partially divert from, and go beyond, Omvedt with regard to parallels and differences between Ambedkar and Durkheim’s and Weber’s sociologies of religion.

(⁷⁰) Ambedkar quotes these parts of Durkheim's book in 1989g, 179f (pointed out by Kumar 2015, 41). The first English translation of *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* appeared in 1915.

(⁷¹) Ambedkar made the emphasis on the non-individualist character of religion in a context in which Gandhi and other high-caste Hindus had strongly objected to Ambedkar's agenda of Untouchables' change of religion. At the same time, Ambedkar also questions the view of a 'special religious instinct inherent in the nature of the individual' (1989b, 409), apparently directed against ideas like those of Rudolf Otto regarding the 'numinous'.

(⁷²) Similarly, Lakshmi Narasu in his *Essence of Buddhism* (quoted by G. Aloysius in the preface to Narasu 2002, xix).

(⁷³) At one point, he uses the formula that Dhamma 'consists of Prajna and Karuna' (Ambedkar 1992, 317).

(⁷⁴) As Ambedkar writes:

His [the Buddha's] religion is a discovery in the sense that it is the result of inquiry and investigation into the conditions of human life on earth and understanding of the working of human instincts with which man is born, the moulding of his instincts and dispositions which man has formed as a result of history and tradition and which are working to his detriment. (Ambedkar 1992, 217f)

Ambedkar also regularly refers to the law of causality.

(⁷⁵) 'The only claim he made was that his message was the only true way to salvation as he understood it. It was based on universal human experience of life in the world' (Ambedkar 1992, 222).

(⁷⁶) Dewey here refers to 'aims and ideals that move us' and are generated by the imagination, but 'not made out of imaginary stuff' (2013, 45; cf. Joas 2000, 114f; Fuchs 2001, 250, 261). This would connect to Ambedkar's remarks on the reality and social force of ideals (see above).

(⁷⁷) '... Buddhism is the only religion which [the] world can have. ... If the new world ... must have a religion—and the new world needs religion more than the old world did—then it can only be the religion of the Buddha' (Ambedkar 2003a, 105).

(⁷⁸) As Gandhi strongly reminded Ambedkar: 'I am convinced that a change of faith by him [Ambedkar] and those who passed the resolution [at the famous conference in Yeola, Maharashtra, on 13 October 1935] will not serve the cause which they have at their heart, ... especially when it is remembered that their

lives for good or for evil are intervolved with those of caste Hindus' (Gandhi quoted in Keer 1990 [1954], 255).

(⁷⁹) 'You', Ambedkar told a Mahar audience on 31 May 1936, 'are as separate from the Hindus as Muslims and Christians are. As Hindus do not have inter-dinings and inter-marriages with Muslims and Christians, so is their relation with you. Your society and that of the Hindus are two distinct groups' (2003d, 131).

(⁸⁰) '... [T]his Hindu religion is not the religion of our ancestors, but it was a slavery forced upon them' (Ambedkar 1936, section 14; cf. Ambedkar 2003d, 133).

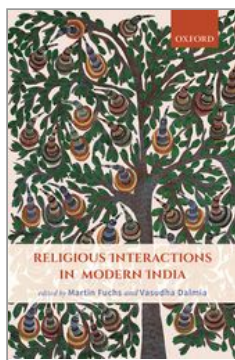
(⁸¹) The lack of agency in the case of Dalits converted to Christian denominations put him off (1989e, 471f).

(⁸²) Ambedkar seemed to be of two minds regarding the question whether the sangha could today still be trusted as intellectual guide and the bhikkhus as servants of the 'common man'; he had become very sceptical of the sense of compassion and responsibility and the emancipatory role of the bhikkhu sangha in contemporary Buddhist countries (2003a, 106f; Ambedkar 1992, Introduction; 435).—Rodrigues (1993, 333) argues that Ambedkar sought a new, equal relationship between bhikkhus and laypeople, *upasakas*.

(⁸³) Cf. Joas (1996, 270–85).

(⁸⁴) The notion of social recognition crops up in Ambedkar's writings only exceptionally. With two influential publications by Taylor (1994) and especially Axel Honneth (1996; orig. German ed. 1992) recognition became a central term of socio-philosophical, sociological, and political science debate since the 1990s and was systematically applied to the analysis of the social struggles of the Dalits (Fuchs 1999; Fuchs 2017a).

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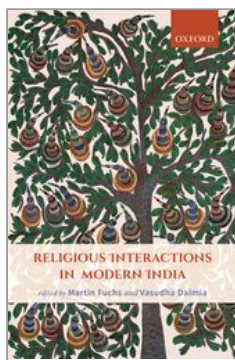
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